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THE FASHION OF FRILL: THE ART OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN THE ATLANTA LOLITA AND JAPANESE STREET FASHION COMMUNITY

by

CHANCY J. GATLIN

Under the Direction of Emanuela Guano, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is a multifaceted fashion community that developed in the early 2000s. The majority of the members wear Lolita fashion which is a fusion of Victorian era dress, Rococo costume, and various Japanese street fashions. Lolita fashion developed on the streets of Tokyo Japan in the 1990s and has since spread across the world. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community heavily relies on the building and maintenance of impressions by its members. In this thesis, I analyze face-to-face and virtual community organization, fashion, and photography to illustrate how members of the community build their impressions, how they are maintained, or how they are threatened.

INDEX WORDS: Subculture, Social media, Community, Brand, Cosplay, Photography

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by

CHANCY J. GATLIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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THE FASHION OF FRILL: THE ART OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN THE ATLANTA LOLITA AND JAPANESE STREET FASHION COMMUNITY

by

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December 2014

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the many people who have helped me through this long and arduous process. I would like to thank my parents, Rick and Beverly Gatlin, for putting up with me and my stresses throughout my year and a half of fieldwork and thesis writing. I would also like to thank my wonderful boyfriend, Jesse Anderson, for always being there for me when I felt like giving up and for helping me push through. I would like to thank my brother, Wyatt Gatlin, for constantly offering up his expertise on all things “otaku”. I would like to thank Hiroyuki Isobe and Machiko Ozeki for opening up their home to me in Tokyo last year. The experience I gained while in Japan was in invaluable! Lastly, I would like to thank all of my fellow anthropology graduate students at Georgia State University for sharing their research and writing experiences with me and giving me constructive feedback on my work.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"She isn't a *real* Lolita because she's not wearing brand". "She is so fat. Fucking landwhale". "Why isn't she wearing a petticoat or blouse"? "brandwhore". "Eww, her knees are showing!" "Get out of our community"! These are comments that I heard and read far too often during my year working with the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. The fear of being the recipient of these comments, either in person, or more likely on one of the anonymous online forums, is the primary reason why Lolitas are consciously image-focused. Lolitas spend thousands of dollars and countless hours maintaining their image in hopes of becoming a proper Lolita and attaining the approval of others.

> We keep telling her that her coords (coordinates/outfits) suck but she won't listen to anyone. I mean, her wigs are always ratty and smelly, and her dresses are too short and you can see the back of her fat knees. Sometimes she even tries to play off replicas as 'brand'. What bullshit. Sometimes she doesn't even wear a petticoat….She likes to make and sell her own accessories instead of buying them, and they suuuuuccccckkkk. Who would ever buy that nasty shit? We all wish she would leave the comm (community).

It was during this first interview with Kera, a self-identified 'sweet' Lolita, a college student, and a long-time member of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community that I knew I wanted to analyze how members manage their impressions in order to avoid this slander.

The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is multifaceted and socially complex. This thesis explores the visual aspects of the community and their role in attempting to negotiate and manage impressions. I aim to answer the following question: How do Lolitas manage their impressions through various mediums such as the internet, interactions with the

face-to-face community, fashion, and photography? I thus purport to analyze how the members' use of photography, shopping, social media, and public performance form and manage the impressions given off to other members and to outsiders.

I focus on a three specific themes to illustrate the various ways in which Lolitas manage their impressions. These themes include the face-to-face and virtual community, fashion, and photography. Each of these themes holds great significance for the members. Though these themes are not all-encompassing of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion community subculture, they represent the most significant visual aspects of Lolita fashion and those that best define the community. I continue my introductory chapter with an in-depth literature review of various topics and theories that I use to illustrate my points. These topics and theories include impression management, subcultural studies, and fashion and photography theories, as well as their associated histories and necessary background information. I continue my introduction with an overview of the methods that I used during my ethnographic research, followed by a section on ethics and limitations to my research project. I discuss my role as an ethnographer and as a community member before delving into chapter two.

My second chapter describes and analyzes the face-to-face and virtual Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion communities. I provide background and historical information about the community's origin and evolution over that past decade as well as information about its organization, political structure, and rules and regulations. I also discuss in detail the process for their gatherings (meet-ups) as well as their various forms of public performance. I also explore the community's existence on multiple social media outlets, how members congregate and organize through the internet, and how they interact with each other through online forums. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of anonymous forums associated with the lolitasphere

and argue how these forums create a panopticon and general fear of anonymous policing in both the face-to-face and virtual communities. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is much more active as a virtual community than it is as a physical one. The majority of their communication and interaction take place online. Therefore, the virtual community is a significant theme I explore and discuss in my ethnography.

My third chapter provides an illustration of the various sub-styles of Lolita fashion as well as other forms of Japanese fashions that influence the Lolita style. I also pay particular attention to the fashion's close relation to cosplay in the United States as well as the controversy surrounding Lolitas and their dislike of the practice. Additionally, I discuss how Lolitas and cosplayers both participate in mutual events that celebrate Japanese animation and popular culture. I dedicate a portion of this section to describe the various shopping methods utilized by members and analyze why particular venues are preferred over others. I explore how the community members utilize various online shopping methods to obtain their products and how much of their social interaction includes talk about shopping experiences. Shopping services, Japanese 'Brand' shops, American and European indie brands, Etsy shops, virtual auctions, Chinese replica shops, social media-based trading, and Facebook GOs (group orders) are the main methods of shopping for Lolita fashion. This chapter ends with an illustration of my observation at the 2014 Anime Weekend Atlanta Baby the Stars Shine Bright and Indie Designer Fashion Show.

My fourth chapter is dedicated to the use of photography in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. From what I have observed, photography seems to be the reason behind many social behaviors in the Lolita subculture. The community members host and participate in multiple meet-ups per month which consist of social gatherings at a restaurant,

park, festival, shopping venue, etc. These events are accompanied by a photography session which often outweighs the event both in length and in significance. In order to illustrate the importance of photography in impression management to the Lolita community, this chapter begins with a discussion of the dynamics of power in the Lolita community, paying particular attention the reactions of Lolitas to being photographed by the public and their feelings of violation. I argue that unauthorized photography by the public acts as a violation of the intended impression that Lolitas have worked so hard to create. I illustrate this point by discussing my observation experience as the Atlanta Zoo. This chapter proceeds with a discussion of photography as a complex social practice and detail how the members of the community utilize photography. This chapter ends with a discussion about the use of photography in social media as a method to manage the Lolita impression in the virtual community. I go on to illustrate this phenomenon with my observations at the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community Putumayo Brand Tea Party at Anime Weekend Atlanta 2013.

I will conclude my thesis with a brief summary of each chapter, followed by a discussion of each of the presented themes and their role in creating the Lolita impression. I will then discuss the importance of my research and how it contributes to the greater body of knowledge, particularly in regards to subcultural studies and internet-based communities. This chapter ends with my suggestions for further research on Lolita fashion and Japanese subculture fashions.

1.1 Lolita 101

Lolita fashion is a synthesis of Japanese street fashion, Victorian era dress, and Rococo costume that gained popularity on the streets of Tokyo, Japan in the early 1990s. The fashion was created with the emergence of Shōjo (literally meaning young/little woman) manga in the

early 1950s. Shōjo manga shifted from a demographic of young girls to a much wider and older audience in the 1970s (Hori 2013). Lolita clothing style was not worn as a fashion until the early 1970s when only kurololi (all black Lolita style clothing) and shirololi (all white Lolita style clothing) were worn. It was not until the early 1990s that Lolita fashion became much more individualistic and popular among the youth in Japan. Young teens in Japan began to adopt more personalized styles of Lolita fashion, resulting in the creation of multiple styles and sub-styles of Lolita dress.

Figure 1.1.1 Shirololi. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Figure 1.1.2 Kurololi. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

The typical Lolita coordinate consists of a few basic elements. The base piece consists of a jumperskirt, one-piece dress, or skirt and blouse. The blouse, which is worn with a jumperskirt or skirt is often elaborate with multiple layers of lace or chiffon. A petticoat is worn in order to create the poof under the skirt and create the sought-after Lolitaesque silhouette. Lolitas also wear frilly bloomers underneath their dresses and petticoats to protect their modesty and to add to the frilliness of the dress. Typical legwear consists of tights, knee or thigh high socks, or short bobby socks. Traditional Lolita shoes are solid-colored with a chunky heal, multiple straps, and bows. Distinctive Lolita accessories include the long curly wig, headbow, heavy make-up, and multiple matching necklaces, rings, and bracelets. Though there is some variation in style and personal flair, this is the typical Lolita coordinate.

The major styles of Lolita are ‘elegant gothic Lolita’ (which consists of mostly black clothing), ‘sweet Lolita’ (which incorporates light pastel colors and the illusion of being a young child), ‘classic Lolita’ (the most similar to Victorian-era dress and Rococo period costume), and

'Ōji' (or Kodona, a more western term), the masculine form of Lolita fashion, also known as shounen-kei or boystyle. Other sub-styles of Lolita include bittersweet Lolita (a combination of elegant gothic Lolita and sweet Lolita), sailor style, hime Lolita (princess style), country Lolita, aristocrat (a more mature version of classic Lolita style), Guro Lolita (gore), punk style, wa Lolita (traditional Japanese look), OTT Lolita (over-the-top Lolita), shirololi (all white), and kuroloili (all black). All of these Lolita fashion styles can be worn by both men and women. However, when a man wears traditionally female Lolita clothing, he is considered to be a "brolita".

Figure 1.1.3 Ōji/Kodona[1]

The fashion became popular in the United States in the early 2000s with the rise in popularity of Japanese animation (anime) and Japanese comics (manga). Characters that dressed in Lolita fashion filled volumes of Shōjo manga and countless anime television shows and movies. Many of the members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community that I interviewed claimed that their first exposure to Lolita fashion was while watching Japanese

[1] http://aerynsys.tumblr.com/. Last accessed November 12, 2014.

anime or reading manga. Many members expressed that these shows and comics inspired them to dress in the fashion.

Bethany, a well-known expert on the history of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community, has been a member of the community for nearly a decade. She identifies as a sweet Lolita and aims to adopt to cute aesthetic in her everyday life. During our interview, she was wearing a pink and blue Baby the Stars Shine Bright jumperskirt and numerous accessories to achieve the 'over-the-top' (OTT) Lolita look. She, like many of the members of the community, is a student. She also works with children for a living and is pursuing her degree in early childhood education. Bethany became interested in Lolita fashion through her love of pixel art while in high school. Since Bethany is a founding member, she happily shared with me the origins of the community and its evolution. Bethany explained that "the community began in the early 2000s as only a few girls from Atlanta with similar interests in Lolita fashion. Girls came together because of interests in anime, ball-jointed dolls, and even pixel art! Early on, meet-ups were really small with only three to five girls". The community began to grow slowly over the next few years and became a formal internet-based organization on LiveJournal on February 10th, 2005. In 2014, with the formal organization now residing on Facebook and interest in Japanese pop culture growing rapidly, the community has nearly four-hundred members and hosts one or two meet-ups per week. Today, meet-ups tend to range in attendance from roughly ten to seventy members. Larger events can have anywhere from one hundred to three hundred people. The community attracts members from all over Georgia. It also has many members who live in other states that often participate in Atlanta-based annual events like the Annual Lolita Formal Tea and Anime Weekend Atlanta. The members who make up the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community range demographically. The majority of the members are

middle class students and range in age from eighteen to twenty-five. Most of the community members are also female. The community also enjoys a degree of ethnic and racial diversity. The majority of the members either identify as white or black, though there are quite a few Asian members as well.

The members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community participate in meet-ups to display their fashions and spend time with like-minded individuals with similar interests. Meet-ups, both in Japan and the United States, are very similar. Lolitas get together at parks, shopping malls, restaurants, etc. and wear their coordinates. There have recently been a lot of meet-ups hosted by members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. These include apple-picking, a Halloween party, gothic meet-up at Oakland Cemetery, and the strawberry-themed picnic. A notable meet-up that I attended last year was the Third Annual Atlanta Lolitas Holiday Cookie and Gift Exchange.

Figure 1.1.4 Cookie Table at Third Annual Atlanta Lolitas Holiday Cookie and Gift Exchange Party. Photo by Becky Higgins.

This meet-up was held at a member's home in Decatur outside of Atlanta. Members of the community wore holiday-themed coordinates and baked cookies to present and exchange with their fellow Lolitas. The event had over sixty attendees. In addition to the cookie exchange,

members also participated in a Secret Santa gift exchange and a Secret Satan. For the Secret Santa gift exchange, members were told to buy their assigned Lolita a gift averaging $25 dollars. For the Secret Satan gift exchange, members were responsible for buying their assigned Lolita an offensive or ugly gift under ten dollars. After Lolitas exchanged cookies and gifts, many members engaged in photo-taking and socializing until the meet-up was over.

The Lolita fashion community is complex and riddled with interesting phenomena that are worth researching and exploring further. For the purposes of my research, however, I chose to research how a Lolita's personal fashion and self-image is expressed to the rest of the community and to outsiders. This phenomenon indicates what influences their clothing choices, how they interact with the community, and how they present themselves overall through various mediums.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Impression Management

Impression management is significant to the study of the Lolita fashion subculture because members regularly interact with each other and rely on their impression given off to maintain their place in the community. Individuals who are involved in subculture groups often aim to conform to the group's general culture, aesthetic, and group commonalities in order to fit in and maintain their place within the group. This is often carried out through the art of impression management. Many members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community strongly manipulate their impression in order to gain prestige, positively influence their social status, and gain entrance into popular cliques within the community. This holds particularly true in regards to Lolita community meet-ups where potential new members may be

in attendance and where photos are likely to be taken and uploaded onto social media. Lolitas are particularly selective of the photos that they choose to display on social media outlets in order to develop and manage their impression give-off to the larger community. Lolitas are very careful about which photos they post so that they can avoid policing by other Lolitas on anonymous internet forums such as Behind the Bows and CGL (Cosplay/Gothic Lolita) on 4Chan. It is only with photographs that this incrimination is possible. These internet forums are a form of anonymous policing for Lolitas all over the world. Members are constantly fearful of being posted to the forums, therefore they choose to practice endless impression management and are always on their best behavior. Many members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community also have an autonomous identity, meaning that they carefully and actively monitor their impressions, aim to construct a positive image, are concerned with what is trendy (newly released prints, for example), and aim to positively influence their position in their community. Lolitas seem to manage their personas like products, promoting them through photographs.

Impression management is the conscious or unconscious attempt to skew the perception of an individual (Dillard et al 2000:404-405), or more simply, self-presentation with the aim of enhancing one's image in the eyes of other people (Sinha 2009:104). The term 'impression management' was coined by Irving Goffman in 1959 and has since been a popular topic in sociology, cultural studies, and business management. There are two types of communications that aid in impression management: expressions given, and expressions given off. Impression management is also a fundamental and universal process that is influenced by both social and cultural factors. Furthermore, various motives and strategies of impression management exist to manipulate the expressions given off which can be broken down into defensive and assertive strategies (Goffman 1959:210; Leary, Allen, and Terry 2011:419).

Impression management is concerned primarily with the expressions given off and how others perceive them (Goffman 1959:3-4). Impression management is a performance of an outer self, similar to acting out a character in a play. Performers of impression management are playing characters who avoid displaying their backstage view. Lolitas manage their impression that they give off very carefully through means such as photography, fashion, and their presence on the internet. The backstage often includes the inner self, glimpses of home life, or unflattering characteristics that individuals wish to keep private or secret from the audience (Goffman 1959:11). In contrast, the 'frontstage' view, also known as a 'front', refers to all activity of an individual that occurs while actively managing the impression (Goffman 1959:22). Lolitas carefully monitor themselves to ensure outward display of elegance, fantastic gallantry, sweetness, virtuosity, and brilliance that is necessary of a 'proper' Lolita. Lolitas often aim to hide this backstage view from other community members in order to maintain their impression.

Figure 1.2.1 Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

According to Goffman, performers must maintain defensive strategies and practices to maintain their impression. They must also have dramaturgical discipline. They must avoid unmeant gestures, faux pas, and general sources of embarrassment in order to add to the character and help protect their backstage self. Performers must remember their parts, be in character at all times, and be able to recover at a moment's notice if they are caught off guard or make a mistake in the performance (Goffman 1959:210). The outer self that is performed is generally relaxed when the performer is around people with whom they are comfortable, like family and close friends whom they have known for a long time. In contrast, performers are extra careful to maintain their "front" when encountering new, influential, or powerful individuals (Goffman 1959:222). The audience is also a contributing factor in the maintenance of the illusion. The audience tends to exercise tact and protective practices that benefit the performer and his or her ability to protect their backstage persona (Goffman 1959:234).

Impression management is a fundamental and universal process involving social and cultural influences. Socially, impression management, either intentional or unintentional, is a constructive feature of social interaction (Ferrante 2008:131). When intentionally practicing impression management, people aim to obtain a favorable social outcome with those around them by implementing a manufactured persona. The successful manipulation of one's impression can positively influence their social status and often increase their prestige. Cultural capital is an attempt to expand the term 'capital' to something much more than economic by encompassing the linguistic ability, manners, preferences, and orientations that a person possesses. Cultural capital is comprised of the "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language" (Bourdieu 1977:82). Evidence of cultural capital exists in symbolic goods and attributes of excellence, and results in a distinction between the upper and lower classes (Bourdieu 1976:66).

According to Bourdieu (1986:242), there are three subtypes of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The embodied subtype describes the dispositions of the mind and body. The objectified subtype refers to cultural goods (pictures, books, instruments, etc.). The institutionalized subtype refers to one's educational qualifications (Bourdieu 1986: 242). In general, a person's ability to manipulate their impressions given off will help them gain cultural capital over time. In stark contrast, when unsuccessful, impression management can cause a drop in social status and reveal the deception and falsification of the self (Norris 2011:1).

Aside from the social influence on impression management, there are several cultural influences as well. A person's culture, for example, can often influence how he or she should act, what he or she should wear, which products to buy, etc. People from all around the world go to great lengths to simulate their society's popular culture by maintaining active control of how others view them. The goal is often to properly "fit" into one's dominant culture (Norris 2011:1) and not be viewed as an outsider. Erving Goffman's 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* closely defines and outlines the concept of impression management. Since its release, various researchers have modified the definition and added to the evolution of the concept. In particular, many hypotheses have developed that suggest new reasons for the expressions given off.

Not all people in a society aim to fit into the dominant culture or desire to utilize impression management to do so. Some people express their own personal beliefs regardless of how they appear to the larger audience. This concept is referred to as the 'social obliviousness hypothesis' (Schlenker and Weigold 1990:820). These individuals are either oblivious or indifferent to the impressions they create and are often very private and unaware of societal norms. This obliviousness often results in self-conscious feelings when in public due to their

unconformity (Schlenker and Weigold 1990:820). In contrast, the 'autonomous identity hypothesis' refers to those who prefer to create an identity of being autonomous, independent, and forthright. These individuals closely and actively control and monitor their impressions given off in order to maintain an autonomous identity, both to the audience, and to themselves. These individuals aim to please their audience and construct a positive image for display (Schlenker and Weigold 1990:821). They are concerned with what is "in" and popular at the time. The impression management process that these individuals undergo is most likely to positively influence their position in society, gain or maintain a popular status, or gain social capital (Schlekner and Weigold 1990:820 and 824). Of these two alternative hypotheses, the 'autonomous identity hypothesis' seems to be much more common today due to the rise of communication technologies and social media. This hypothesis is also far more relevant to the Lolita fashion community.

Figure 1.2.2 Classic Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Impression management has also come to encompass defensive strategies instead of only intended impressions given off in order to obtain a positive result. Impression management can be used as a response to unwanted attention (McDonnell and King 2013:393) and is usually aimed at protecting the individual's self-esteem. The most common defensive strategy is the intentional redirection of conversation as a way to avoid presenting glimpses of the backstage. Defensive impression management is used to prevent giving off the wrong impression, receiving a negative reaction, and revealing the usually undisclosed 'backstage' (Leary, Allen, and Terry 2011:419). These defensive strategies are often seen by new members of the community at meet-ups and community events.

The study of impression management has changed drastically since the 1950s, particularly since the dawn of the internet and social media. Social media sites in particular, are often used as a way to fulfill desires for belonging and allow for easy-access self-presentation to friends, family, and outsiders. Users of social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, etc., much like in a face-to-face context, will hide their 'backstage' and display a carefully monitored 'self' for others to see. Many Facebook users, for example, will refrain from posting self-determined unflattering photos of themselves for fear that they will be negatively judged by their friends or family.

This anonymous policing in the community resembles Jeremy Bentham's idea of the panopticon (1995). The panopticon is an institutional building, but what it represents can be applied to multiple social situations. Often applied to architecture used for prisons, the panopticon is a large circular building with a tower in the center. This center tower is reserved for the prison guards and allows for full visibility of the prisoners below. The prisoners who occupy the circumference of the building can be seen at all times by the guards, but are unable to

view the guards from their location. In the case of the panopticon, there are multiple prisoners and only a few prison guards. The prisoners have no visibility of the few guards at the center. Because any given prisoner is unsure if the guards are watching him or her specifically at any given time, the prisoner internalizes this gaze and disciplines him or herself (Bentham 1995:5). The concept of the panopticon is extremely useful in analyzing the internet Lolitasphere and provides insight into the process of anonymous policing in the community.

1.2.2 Subculture

The Lolita fashion subculture is very complex. The exaggerated childlike aesthetic of Lolita fashion is a type of refusal because Lolitas aim to breakout of the mainstream aesthetic and society's expectation of what an 'adult' should wear. These acts tend to have a subversive value (Hebdige 1979:3). Though there are some middle-aged Lolitas, the majority of them are in their late-teens or early twenties. Many of Lolitas in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community are college students or working young adults. It is no surprise that the majority of the community members fall into this age range since this is the age when generational conflict and adoption of subcultural identity is likely to occur. Many of the members with whom I spoke said that in addition to their love for anime and manga, they actively went out in search of finding a community to join in order to find a place of belonging. One of the Lolitas I met, Amanda, explained that she feels an enormous sense of power when wearing Lolita and believes that wearing the fashion is a way of speaking out against normative fashion behaviors. Her explanation was not a common theme in my interviews, but I personally felt a sense of empowerment when wearing Lolita fashion (particularly sweet Lolita). In addition to the reasons why Lolitas entered the Lolita fashion subculture, members utilize the internet,

social media, and digital photography to display their individualized identity. These practices have resulted in the development of a complex subculture.

For the remainder of my literature review, I am going to focus on subculture groups and subculture theory, followed by an analysis of fashion and photography as utilized by these subculture groups to influence impression management. The discipline of subcultural studies has shifted over the past several decades since its emergence in the 1920s. From the early subculture theory produced out of the University of Chicago, to foundational works of Dick Hebdige in the late 1970s, to the later post-subcultural theory in the early 2000s, subcultural studies as an academic discipline has gained popularity and has changed the way in which researchers view culture. It is of upmost importance, however, to first understand the definition of subculture, as well as the history and development of subculture theory.

The word ‘subculture’ comes equipped with preconceived notions of secrecy, mystery, ideas of the underworld, and things that are considered to be taboo in a society (Hebdige 1979:3-4). A subculture is a subordinate group that exists within a broader culture in a society. A subculture deviates from the mainstream popular culture and the collective identity of the majority in a given society. Subculture groups often aim to contradict the mainstream culture which is frequently visible in popular television and in movies, music, and other forms of mass media. Mainstream cultures develop hegemonic (if discursive) representations of class, status, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. (Hebdige 1979).

Subcultures tend to deviate wildly from this broader mainstream popular culture, typically by embracing and proudly displaying the aspects of their subculture that are different from what is ‘normal’. This concept is often known as ‘refusal’ (Hebdige 1979:2). Refusal is a

way of making a statement through small expressive acts, often times with clothing, body modification, gestures, or other acts of deviance.

Figure 1.2.3 Infantilized Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Refusal aids in the creation of outward expression and style, suggesting that the display of certain items or 'signs' that a group wears can be used to set themselves apart from popular mainstream society (Hebdige 1979:3-4).

Subculture groups tend to develop around working class youth, though they can appear in other instances. The deviation from the mainstream commonly stems from the desire to create an imaginary solution to a working class lifestyle. There often tends to be a "generational conflict" between the youth and the parent culture, particularly relating to consumerist values and integration of popular culture (Cohen 1972:1). This is often referred to as a "generation gap" among many people today. This generational conflict can lead to alienation, resulting in the adoption of subcultural identity, abandonment of the current community, and shift from one subcultural group to another in order to develop a feeling of self and of place (O'Brien 2008:8).

Countercultures, in contrast, are subcultural groups which deviate from ‘normal’ mainstream society for the purpose of opposition. While the general term ‘subculture’ refers to a group that deviates from the norm as well, countercultures take this concept a step further and choose to oppose the mainstream to make a political or cultural statement. Countercultures are often times involved with social movements. However, countercultural groups tend to be non-specific and fluid, incorporating a diverse array of individuals from varying subculture groups for a common goal. These groups tend to manifest themselves quite differently from one another due to their lack of cultural uniformity, greatly depending on socio-political, cultural, and demographic circumstances (Whiteley and Sklower 2014:3). These countercultures, like typical subculture groups, tend to adopt signs and certain fashions to differentiate themselves from the mainstream.

A familiar counterculture to provide as an example is the hippie counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s. The hippies had their own distinct style that was recognizable outside of the popular mainstream aesthetic. As part of their style, hippies used the peace sign to communicate with other members of the counterculture and also to communicate their social and moral stance to non-members of the group. These signs are most often, “elements in communication systems governed by systematic rules and codes which are not themselves directly apprehended in experience” (Hebdige 1979:13). This definition holds true for both subcultures and their more activist counterparts, countercultures. Like most countercultures, the hippie counterculture was also very involved in social movements and various forms of social activism, a key factor in the differentiation between subcultures and countercultures. Some social movements that hippies were involved with include the campaign for nuclear disarmament after the Vietnam War, various anti-war campaigns, draft-card burnings, and the sexual liberation movement.

Since Dick Hebdige's foundational work on subculture theory in the 1970s, there have been debates surrounding the concept of subculture. The 1990s and early 2000s saw the rise of several critiques of Hebdige's theory. His theory became conceptually redundant and did not apply to the current youth subculture groups who have become much more reflexive, fluid, and fragmented. In the mid-1990s, sociologist Michel Maffesoli argued that subculture groups were more fluid than originally thought. He developed a concept known as the 'neo-tribe', defined as a subculture group under the pressures and conditions of postmodernity (Maffesoli 1996 in Blackman 2005:11-12). Maffesoli's works on neo-tribes lead the way for theorists such as David Muggleton (2000), Ben Malbon (1999), and Andy Bennet (2000), to build on and evolve the early subcultural theories (Blackman 2005:11).

Subculture groups have further evolved since those in the 1970s Hebdige-era due to the increasing flow of cultural commodities, texts, and images, resulting in a more individualized identity and notion of the self (Bennett 2005:493). These youth groups have evolved and have become concerned with the 'surface' and self-authentication (Blackman 2005:10). They are far more complex than originally thought; youth identity must be regarded as a reflexive lifestyle which combines resources from local and international industries (Bennett 2005:494). This popular critique of traditional subcultural theory resulted in what is known as 'post-subcultural' theory (Bennett 2011:493).

The field of post-subcultural studies is a relatively recent field compared to other fields of cultural studies. Though there were a few references to the concept of post-subculture in the late 1980s, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that post-subcultural studies became widely studied in academia. The first symposium of post-subcultural studies was held in Vienna in 2001. The symposium was titled, 'Post-Subcultural Studies: New Post-Subcultural Foundations within

Popular Culture and their Political Impact' (Muggleton 2000:3). This symposium paved the way for further analysis and critique of early subcultural theory. In addition to the drastic shift in individual youth identity because of the increasing flow of cultural commodities, post-subculturalists protest that early subculture theory does not adequately apply to other countries and regions (Bennett 2005:494). Hebdige's theories apply to British youth in relation to British class-consciousness and do not necessarily transfer well to other subculture groups in diverse political, geographical, and socio-economical contexts.

Another critique of traditional subculture theory is that Hebdige focused too much on the idea of conspicuous consumption among youth subcultures to display social class (i.e., the purchasing of symbols like safety pins and leather jackets) (Mattson 2001:71). Often, Hebdige leans on the concept of style to make sense of the subculture, which in his case, becomes redundant and far too oversimplified. Many post-subculturalists argue that Hebdige had an obsession with the concept of style but that style in itself did not adequately portray the variety of efforts that subcultures engaged in to deviate from mainstream popular culture (Mattson 2001:71-72).

Though uncommon, some theorists have refuted both traditional subcultural theories and post-subcultural theories. These theorists claim that subculture groups cannot fit into a simple theoretical dichotomy and have transcended both subcultural and post-subcultural explanations. This argument has developed as a result of the increasing use of the internet, development of virtual communities and subculture groups, and the expanding global culture (Greener and Hollands 2006:415). These theorists also argue that subcultural and post-subcultural theories place too much emphasis on theory and the critique/counter-critique rather than on examining and providing adequate and empirical data as evidence (Greener and Hollands 2006:394). Post-

subcultural studies is far more applicable and relevant to the study of the Lolita fashion subculture group than classic subcultural studies. This is due, among others, to the attention post-subcultural studies scholars pay to social media.

1.2.3 Emergence of Japanese Fashion Subcultures

I continue my analysis of subculture by providing a background of Japanese street fashion subcultures. An understanding of Japanese fashion subculture history is necessary to trace the origins of Lolita fashion, how it evolved through the decades, and in what contexts it exists today. This history creates a base for the study of Lolita fashion subculture in the United States, and specifically, the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. Japan emerged as a fashion leader in the 1980s when its unique fashions hit the international catwalk (Kondo 1997:55). Along with Japanese high fashion, Japanese street fashion subcultures also developed. Much like the United States in the 1980s, this period saw the emergence of popular glam-rock and heavy metal bands. This movement among musicians was referred to as Visual Kei (visual style) and was characterized by its outrageous hairstyles, heavy make-up, flamboyant clothing, and androgynous aesthetic[2]. The 1980s was a thriving period for Japanese high fashions and street fashions alike. However, it is Japan's subculture street fashions that have received international attention among Western youth groups. These extravagant fashion have evolved and become more abundant, filled various forms of media (manga, anime, film, popular Japanese dramas, American cartoons, etc.), have spread across the world, and are worn by many people every day (McKnight 2010:118; Kawamura 2012:126-128).

[2] http://visualkei.wikia.com/wiki/Visual_Kei.\. Last accessed on April 19, 2014.

Japanese subculture fashions experienced a significant influence from popular and historical French fashions over the last few decades. Japanese films such as famed 2004 film *Shimtsuma Monogatari (Kamikaze Girls)* have depicted courtly French regalia, as well as baroque and rococo aesthetics. French fashions and aesthetics display elegance, fantastic gallantry, sweetness, virtuosity, and brilliance (McKnight 2010:118), all of which are marks of a proper Lolita. This French aesthetic is filtered through a Japanese lens, which in turn is observed by American eyes, creating what local Lolitas perceive as the proper Lolita look. These subculture street fashions have been embraced by Japanese designers, consumers, artists, and actors since the 1980s. In manga and anime, early artists incorporated French aesthetics into their characters as well that then influenced street fashions in Japan (McKnight 2010:118-119).

After the emergence of Visual Kei fashion and the movement's fashion subculture in the 1980s, new Japanese street fashion subcultures did not develop for nearly a decade. The majority of the street fashion subcultures developed due to both Japan's struggling economy in the early 1990s and to the youths' desire to stand out in an extremely homogenous and aesthetically conforming society. Since Japan's economic collapse in the early 1990s, the sought after ideal of lifelong employment was no longer guaranteed (Kawamura 2012:35-36). When students graduate from high school, they no longer feel the guaranteed security of obtaining a college degree and entering the workforce. This has created a large population of parasite-singles (young adults that rely on their parents financially) and NEETS (Not in employment, education, or training) (Kawamura 2012:40-41). These graduates rely on their parents for support and are able to use what money they do have on street fashion and various forms of visual self-expression.

Fashion subcultures also developed as a result of the youths' desire to stand out in an extremely homogenous and aesthetically conforming society. The Japanese youth have a

particularly homogenous fashion aesthetic. Children grow up wearing uniforms throughout grade school and high school. As soon as they enter the workforce, it is likely that they will wear attire common of the Japanese *Sararīman*, which often consists of black pants and a white or light colored dress shirt. Aside from clothing, the majority of the Japanese have dark brown hair. Many members of fashion subcultures will alter their hair color in addition to wearing street fashions. Wearing street fashions and belonging to Japanese fashion subcultures allows for self-expression outside of Japan's aesthetically conforming society (Kawamura 2012:33-36). Members of these subculture groups wear specific clothing and accessories, which all contribute to the overall impression that they give off to other members and to outsiders.

1.2.3.1 Cosplay

Multiple types of fashions exist in Japan. From the couture fashions of the Rappongi and Ginza districts of Tokyo, to the street fashions in Harajuku and Ikebukuro, Japan has become a global fashion city over the last few decades. Some of these fashions blur into one another slightly, while others are strictly separate. In Japan, it is not uncommon to see Lolitas participate in Cosplay fashions. However, in the United States, Lolita fashion and Cosplay are strictly separate and should never be combined. There are a couple of reasons why cosplay is shunned in the Lolita fashion community. Cosplay has become a popular practice in the anime and Japanese popular culture communities across the world. Lolita fashion, because it is a Japanese street fashion, often times has events at the same conventions that cosplayers attend. Because cosplay is much more common, bystanders at conventions often assume that Lolita fashion is a form of cosplay, rather than a separate street fashion. Lolitas become very offended when they hear the words, "I love your cosplay! Who are you supposed to be?" and sometimes react harshly.

Cosplay is also viewed as a type of performance to the Lolitas. Many view cosplay as a hobby that people enjoy on weekends and that is very versatile. Cosplayers can perform a different character at each convention and may or may not feel a deep connection to that character, creating an intentional performance. In contrast, the wearing of Lolita fashion is an example of performativity, rather than performance. Performativity is the process of repeated acts of naturalization (Butler 1999:xv) which alter reality. It is often an unconscious act. The wearing of Lolita is not a performance, but rather an expression of what Lolitas already feel themselves to be. By wearing the specific Lolita fashion items, members cause their carefully constructed personas to match what they regard as their inner selves.

Cosplay, a shortened term for 'costume play', is an artistic performance in which participants masquerade as a character (Gin 2011:583). In Japan, there is little connection between Lolita fashion and Cosplay. Lolita fashion is popular in the Harajuku neighborhood of Tokyo while Cosplay is mostly limited to Tokyo's technology center, Akihabara. Cosplayers aim to portray characters from popular manga, anime, films, videogames, and live action television. In contrast, Lolita fashion is much more flexible and does not have to conform to the parameters of a particular character. In the United States, however, Japanese street fashions all fall under the same umbrella, leading to the consumption and wear of multiple different fashions by a single person. Though Lolita fashion and Cosplay are visually very different, they both function in very similar ways for the wearer in the United States.

In the United States, cosplay is a growing phenomenon and has developed an interesting organization. Like Lolitas, cosplayers participate in anime conventions and organize in similar ways. Unlike in Japan where cosplay is very organized and generally only done for the purpose of elaborate photo shoots, cosplayers in the United States are much less organized. US

cosplayers will dress up as multiple characters over the course of a convention (typically three to four days), walk around from event to event, pause when a convention participant wants to take a picture, and then continue on with their activities (Benesh-liu 2007:1).

These conventions seem to embody Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque the literary and historical subversion of the dominant culture through chaos, parody, and humor with an aim to temporarily subvert the representations and values of dominant culture (Bakhtin 1984:5). Bakhtin elaborates on this phenomenon by providing the perceived behaviors that are a result of the carnivalesque. First, free and familiar contact between unlikely people is observed (Bakhtin 1984:5-6; Trotman 2013:20). Larger conventions attract attendees from all over the world and various backgrounds with diverse interests. Often, people who are unlikely to spend time together outside of a convention will come together for a weekend and bond over a mutual interest. The festival of Carnival in Brazil, for example, unites the rich, white upper-class and the poor black population for a week every year. These two groups are separated economically, racially, and geographically but unite and celebrate happily during Carnival. Eccentricity is also a trait of the carnivalesque. Eccentricity, or the acceptance of unconventional behavior, leads to greater tolerance and acceptance of the unusual, allowing for a thriving and healthy society overall (Trotman 2013:20-24). Bakhtin describes carnivalesque misalliances where barrier between the expected and the unexpected is often blurred. This allows for the coexistence of unexpected people, things, and phenomena (Bakhtin 1984:5-6; Trotman 2013:25). Bakhtin also outlines the behavior of the profane, or the sacrilegious. Profane behavior, such as the committing of crime, uncrowning of authority, parody, etc., is much more accepted in a carnivalesque situation (Trotman 2013:27-28; Bhaktin 1984:195-196, 285).

Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque is a form of resistance to mainstream culture that is safely contained within clear temporal limits.

All of Bakhtin's categories of carnivalesque behavior can be observed at anime conventions across the globe, including in the United States. However, it is the behavior of eccentricity and the acceptance of difference that is the reason why so many attendees cosplay. People choose to cosplay for many different reasons, but they are generally performed as an appreciation for the character's personality, attitude, or aesthetic (Benesh-liu 2007:1). Some cosplayers choose a character because they personally identify with a character or their story. Participation in cosplay allows the performer to interact with a fantasy world and delve farther into the carnivalesque world of the convention than a non-cosplayer.

Some cosplayers will perform characters of the opposite gender (crossplay), again playing into Bakhtin's concept of eccentricity (Benesh-liu 2007:1). Many characters in anime and manga lack anatomical correctness, which results in gender ambiguity. This trend is closely linked with *yojika*, or the infantilization of Japanese culture, which results in 'incomplete' identity or indistinguishable sexuality and gender (Gin 2011:586). The ambiguity of these characters allows for greater self-expression as well as the performance of fantasies and desires. In these instances, the body of the cosplayer is transformed and actively engaged in modification and performance with those around him or her. In general, the phenomena associated with cosplay are also closely associated with Lolita fashion. Like cosplayers, Lolitas also actively participate in hectic conventions as a means of displaying their work. They embody Bakhtin's behaviors of the carnivalesque, particularly the behavior of eccentricity. They also sometimes display gender ambiguity and forms of crossplay (i.e. Ouji-kodona and brolita).

1.2.4 Fashion Theory

Subculture groups clearly utilize fashion in a variety of different ways. The Lolita fashion subculture is no exception. In the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community, fashion, along with photography, are the most significant ways to manage one's impression. A knowledge of the social uses of fashion aids in the understanding of why people wear specific items and how they influence one's impression management. A brief study of fashion theory allows for the understanding of Lolita fashion, its various elements, related social context, and how it incorporates to influence one's impression. Specific signs that are significant to Lolita fashion include headbows and petticoats. Without these two visual signs, someone may not be considered to be a proper Lolita by the majority of the Lolita fashion community or recognized as such to outsiders. These items are necessary to form the proper Lolita aesthetic, which is the sought-after goal of member impression management.

People tend to make initial assumptions about others based on how they look, even before getting to know them. People use fashion as a way of managing their impression, particularly their 'first impression'. Fashion, though sometimes only associated with garments, also refers to accessories, footwear, hairstyle, and general 'style'. Fashion is an aid to impression management and often times the defining characteristic of a subculture group. Fashion is a collection of signs for communication and can be used as a barometer of cultural change over time. It is also a product of class distinction and dictator of social norms. In general, fashion influences many facets of a person's life and must be analyzed in order to understand various culture groups.

Fashion is an effective tool of communication between and within different culture groups, most often providing information about a specific person or group. Fashion is both

individual and collective. Aside from being used as a method of self-expression, a person's fashion communicates one's economic and social class, personality, sexual preference, character, political position, etc. to others around them (Finkelstein 1999:376; Kuruc 2008:198). Subculture groups and larger social groups communicate their collective identity to others through fashion (Barnard 1996: 56).

Figure 1.2.4 Over-the-Top (OTT) Classic Lolita. Photo by Mario Panebianco

Members accomplish this through the display of specific 'signs'. Examples of signs include safety pins, decorative jackets, ornate hair pieces, themed t-shirts, etc. These signs are imaginary and are only deemed significant because the subculture group has placed a value on them (Barthes 1990:9).

Fashion can also be viewed as a visual language, where each individual piece of clothing or accessory represents a word in a sentence used to make a statement. Clothing is also used to speak for an individual, communicating the same things as verbal language (Lurie 1992:27). A large head-eating headbow communicates to other Lolitas that the wearer most likely identifies

as a “sweet” Lolita and that she aims to give off the youthful baby doll look. Fashion as a form of communication has two distinct levels of meaning: a denotative and connotative level of signification. At the denotative level, fashion is merely clothing with the utilitarian purpose of protecting against the elements. At the connotative level, social and cultural conventions become significant (Kuruc 2008:198).

Fashion is not only a form of communication between individuals and social groups, but it is also a barometer of culture and social change over time. Clothing defines a society’s general lifestyle and popular taste (Bennett 2000:97). Popular tastes of the consumer are extremely significant in that they greatly influence the fashion industry. The fashion industry carefully analyzes consumer taste and lifestyle, then produces and markets a commodity for the public. This process is called “lifestyle” marketing (Entwistle 2000:225-6). These fashions then appear in popular magazines, providing an easily attainable and low-cost report of current trends. The effectiveness of the fashion industry has created a new language of style and has become an immediately accessible international barometer of taste and fashion, reaching consumers from all over the world (Breward 1995:229).

Individuals do not typically walk around blindly accepting popular fashion trends. People selectively choose which fashion trends to partake and display, and which to avoid. These decisions are closely linked to intentional impression management and to social class. For example, there are particular fashion trends that are associated with the upper classes. These trends are passed down from parents to their children, enculturating them to internalize and prefer certain aesthetics instead of others. It is possible that this process can guide the children to a specific social position and is ultimately a way to distance the upper class from the lower (Bourdieu 1979:66).

In an attempt to gain prestige within the community and receive similar benefits to those of the upper classes, members of the middle and lower classes may attempt to imitate their aesthetics. However, imitation is not limited to the upper classes. Most people engage in imitation in one way or another. Imitation is a way of avoiding the creative process by shifting the creative decision-making to another person. It also frees the individual from assuming aesthetic responsibility and allows them to appear as part of the larger group (Simmel 1957: 542-543). People may want the immediate rewards associated with specific aesthetic choices, however, some of them may be unwilling or unable to innovate, resulting in frequent instances of imitation. This is an extremely common practice in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. Many members will imitate the 'popular' Lolitas by wearing similar coordinates, specific prints, or replicas of a particular jumperskirt or dress in attempt to climb the social ladder within the community. Imitation is also a way of expanding the human experience by imitating the past. This applies to both recent fashion trends and historic fashion trends (Simmel 1957:543). Lolita fashion specifically integrates historical French, Victorian era, and rococo fashions with modern street fashions such as 'fairy-kei', 'decora', 'visual-kei', and 'mori-girl'. Imitation is "one of the fundamental tendencies of our character" (Simmel 1957:543) and allows niche trends to evolve and become a part of the popular fashion culture.

Figure 1.2.5 Classic Lolita/Mori Girl Fashion. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Aside from the development of fashion trends, fashion also flows from class-to-class and culture-to-culture in various ways. Theories such as the 'trickle-down', 'trickle-across', and 'trickle-up' have been developed to describe the different directions of fashion flow from one group to another. Lolita fashion has experienced three types of fashion diffusion since the 1980s. The fashion was originally influenced by French high fashion (trickle-down) and now has become reinvented as a popular street fashion and often influences high fashion (trickle-up). It is consumed by both upper and lower classes, replicated and reinvented, and influenced by global media and communication (trickle-across). Popular trends, subculture fashions, and haute couture all develop and spread in different ways. As a result, the vast world of fashion has led to unique origin theories that have framed 20th Century fashion studies. These include the Fashion Systems Model and the Populist Model (Delong n.d.:1).

The "fashion system", often discussed in the marketing field, refers to the complex fashion institution that is responsible for the design, manufacture, distribution, display, and sale

of clothing and accessories (Matthews and Lui 2001:149). In the Fashion Systems Model, fashion trends radiate outward from a distinct 'center', the fashion industry. The fashion-consuming public then makes variations to these fashions and is responsible for popularizing individual items and themes in fashion (Matthews and Lui 2001:149). Unlike the Fashion Systems Model that has one central core, the Populist Model is polycentric. Different fashions developed through different social groups based on age, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, etc. (DeLong n.d.:1). Both of these models have been developed in order to understand the varying origins of fashion trends.

More important than the basic origin theories of fashion are the various theories of fashion flow and distribution. These theories include the "trickle-down" theory, the "trickle-across" theory, and the "trickle-up" theory. The trickle-down theory is the oldest of the three theories and was loosely described in Thorstein Veblen's 1988 *Theory of the Leisure Class*. This theory, which only works in hierarchical societies, claims that fashions are first adopted by upper classes and societal elites. From this point, lower classes begin to adopt these fashions through replication and desire to imitate the affluent class (Simmel 1957:453).

The trickle-across theory was developed as a rebuttal to the trickle-down theory. This theory claims that the constantly changing social environment, rise in media and communication, and the increase of mass manufacturing and merchandising of fashions must be taken into consideration (King 1963:1). In this theory, both upper and lower classes exchange fashions quickly, leaving little time to associate a fashion with either class. This is often reinforced when designers and companies release similar fashions at varying price points (DeLong n.d.:1). The trickle-up theory is the newest of the three fashion theories. In contrast to the trickle-down theory where fashions start with the elite class and are adopted by the lower classes, the trickle-up

theory is the opposite. Street fashions are adopted by high fashion designers and are then consumed by the upper classes (DeLong n.d.:1). The trickle-across theory of fashion offers a look into the possible future of Lolita street fashion. Because the Lolita fashion subculture has grown throughout the last decade, and due to the increasing popularity of Japanese culture in the West, it is not possible to rule out that Lolita fashion could be adopted by high fashion designers and consumed by the upper classes in the near future.

1.2.5 Photography

Lolitas reserve most of their photo-taking for meet-ups and large events. During these events, they carefully document their coordinates with photographs. These photographs are then posted on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram in order to show friends, family, and fellow Lolitas their experiences from the event as well as their coordinates. This "pics or it didn't happen" situation is particularly important when a Lolita obtains a new "print". A Lolita will post on one of the many Lolita-based Facebook pages that she or he got a new "brand" item. Since these products are so expensive, sought-after, and often difficult to obtain, to community members it is extremely important that Lolitas provide photographical evidence of their purchase.

Like fashion, photography is also a complex social practice. Photographs can have deep meaning for the photographer and the photographed. A thorough understanding of photography as a social practice is necessary to determine why members of the Lolita community find photographs so significant in the creation and maintenance of their impression. While viewing a photo, we are tempted to accept it at face value. However, by themselves, photographs do not explain anything. Taking photographs is a social practice among individuals and must be read as

part of the broader social contexts. They are often a defense against social anxiety and a tool of power (Sontag 1977:8). Photography exists as a complex social practice in today's society as well. It is often easy to look at a photo that is seen on social media, for example, and forget the context surrounding the photograph. Susan Sontag (1977) compares the visual experience of the prisoners in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* to how individuals view photographs. Often times, when an individual views a photograph, he or she creates a perception of it, much like the prisoners viewing the reflected images on the wall of the cave. It is important to consider the "backstage" view of the photograph instead of only the "frontstage".

Photographs are also evidence that things actually happened, particularly events and travels (Sontag 1977:5). When a person leaves home to go on vacation, for example, friends and family expect to see photographs. These photos act as proof that an individual traveled to the place that they claimed to (Sontag 1977:9). The same thing applies to events.

Figure 1.2.6 Lolitas at the AWA 2013 Putumayo Tea Party. Photography by unknown.

In general, it is expected that photographs are taken during special events such as graduation, weddings, parties, etc. Without photographical evidence, people begin to question that these claimed events actually happened. This is particularly common today with the extensive use of social media. When a person posts a Facebook status stating that they are going on vacation to a foreign country, many individuals will respond with comments such as, "I can't wait to see your pictures!", or "Pics or it didn't happen!". The traveler in this situation feels an enormous pressure to provide photographical evidence of their experience in order to please their friends and family on social media. Unfortunately, this phenomenon leads to some often unengaging vacations. Individuals become so concerned with obtaining photographical evidence of their trip, that they spend more time viewing their destination through the lens of a camera than enjoying the scenery with their own eyes. Travel becomes an accumulation of picturesque photographical evidence, a souvenir (Sontag 1977:9).

Photographs are also often a defense against social anxiety and a tool of power. In a society where people work long and strenuous work weeks, and stress, anxiety, or depression among individuals is common, photography acts as a soothing form of relaxation that appeases anxiety (Sontag 1977:9-10). Photography, in this instance, also acts as a friendly alternative to work. When on vacation, it is hard to break away from the monotony of a job and truly relax. Therefore, when individuals feel as though they are obligated to take photographs while traveling or during events, they are still being productive while being able to relax and enjoy themselves (Sontag 1977:10). In this instance, photographs act as both a defense against social anxiety and a tool of power for photographer.

I use each of these theories to analyze the complex social structure of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. I continue with a discussion of the ethnographic

methods that I used throughout my field work. These methods, along with the theoretical analysis, help me to further understand the inner-workings of the community and make educated assumptions.

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Interviews

My official ethnographic research on the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community was performed from March 2014 to October 2014. I did, however, conduct informal observations prior to this in order to begin structuring my research project. I utilized various ethnographic methods to explore the visual culture of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community, including traditional and online methods. I derived the majority of my data from traditional ethnographic interviews with members and participant observation with the community. I also obtained my data through social media outlets and shopping sites. In addition, I relied on photography as an ethnographic method to act as a supplement to my data.

I conducted informal semi-structured interviews to obtain my data. I chose to conduct this type of interview because, unlike structured interviews with a rigid set of questions which do not allow diversion, semi-structured interviews allow for easy flow of conversation, a transfer of ideas, and open-ended conversation. I did however, use a general interview guide approach when conducting my interviews. This approach was used to ensure that I covered specific areas of content with each participant, increasing conversation focus while allowing for adaptability. I sectioned my interview guide into six areas: basic information; general Lolita fashion, community, virtual community and social media, class and social status, fashion, and photography.

For my study, I interviewed approximately thirty members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Community, an adequate sample size to support my arguments. The age range of my interview subjects is eighteen to sixty years of age and includes men, women, transgendered, and gender-queer individuals. Interviews lasted from ten minutes to five hours, depending on the desires of the subject. Interviews took place at a variety of locations throughout the study. Some took place at public locations like parks and public squares, while others took place at private locations, like coffee shops, restaurants, private homes, and cars. Each of these locations was determined by the interview subject or were willfully given during community events. I chose to obtain audio recordings during all pre-planned interviews. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain recordings during unplanned interviews at events. To protect the anonymity of my interview subjects, I have used pseudonyms when referring to them in this work. Aside from face-to-face interviews, I also conducted a few interviews via Facebook and email. I resorted to this interview medium due to schedule conflicts and issues with transportation. The majority of the members that I interviewed in this manner live outside of the Metro-Atlanta area but regularly attend Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community events and participate in online community forums.

1.3.2 Participant Observation

Aside from ethnographic interviews, I also engaged in participant observations with the community in order to collect data and obtain a glimpse of an insider's perspective. I utilized this ethnographic method because, aside from being a classic qualitative research method utilized by many social scientists, it allows the researcher to live the same experiences as the research subjects. I achieved this by attending multiple community organized events known as "meet-

ups". In addition to these meet-ups, I also attended several non-community sponsored events that maintain a high Lolita turn-out, specifically Anime Weekend Atlanta (AWA) and MomoCon, both based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Throughout my time working with the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion community, I attended many meet-ups and events. My first experience with the community was at an Asian-style karaoke bar outside of Atlanta. Here, I was able to build rapport with attending members and get my first in-person glimpse of many Lolita garments and accessories. I attended this event with Kera who initially introduced me to the fashion and was a crucial part in my building of rapport with members. Kera is an African American college student in her early twenties who, through a friend, became interested in Lolita fashion while in high school. She is a self-identified "sweet" Lolita who enjoys wearing elements of casual sweet Lolita to work and school every day. In addition to Lolita fashion, she is heavily involved with many subculture groups, particularly the Atlanta BDSM community. Like myself, she was also interested in studying Lolita fashion academically, so she was very excited to help me with my research. She was very helpful in making me feel comfortable at the event and kindly introduced me to many of her Lolita friends. I was not dressed in Lolita fashion like all of the other people in the room. This made me feel slightly uncomfortable and was a major factor in my decision to later have a Lolita-style outfit made for me so that I could be a more active participant in subsequent meet-ups. The best way to truly understand a community is to become a part of it and experience it from the inside. I aimed to embody the Lolita fashion subculture by planning, purchasing, and wearing Lolita fashion to meet-ups, to school, while shopping, and at non-Lolita gatherings. I hoped to gain an insider's perspective on Lolita coordinate preparation, the lengthy task of getting ready for events, and gaining a sense of how Lolitas are perceived by others in public.

1.3.3 Netnography and Use of Social Media

Aside from traditional ethnographic methods, I chose to utilize social media outlets to obtain a portion of my data, therefore adding some online ethnographic methods ("netnography") to my research (Bowler 2010:1270). As the availability of the internet reaches a wider and wider audience each day, more and more people are utilizing sophisticated communication devices like smartphones and tablets to connect with friends and family. Online communities tend to "manifest cultures, the learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to order, guide and direct the behavior of a particular society or group" (Kozinets 1999:12), therefore acting as an extension to traditional ethnographic methods.

Netnography has multiple benefits over traditional ethnography. Online communities, like physical communities, act as a forum for shared interests and shared intent, allowing for relationship building and social interaction (Bowler 2010:1271). However, with online communities, unlike physical communities, it is much easier to obtain general data about the group and easily separate newer members from insiders based on community interaction. Netnography, like traditional ethnography, involves planning, gaining entry, data collection, and interpretation. These are crucial steps in producing a successful netnography. Netnography is often much faster, less expensive, and simpler than traditional ethnography. It is immersive, descriptive, and allows for considerable adaptation for the researcher (Kozinets 2010).

Netnography is a necessary research method to utilize because the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community has a much larger following on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and LiveJournal than it does in the physical world. Therefore, I relied on social media as a source for both my general communication with the community and as a method for gaining

information about the community's internal politics and social interactions among members. The community utilizes Facebook to disseminate information about upcoming events, rules, regulations, and topics of interest to its members. I relied on the community's Facebook page to provide me with details for meet-ups including time, location, cost, and theme. I also used Facebook to sift through many member's Lolita fashion photographs to gain a sense of community fashion trends over time and to see how their coordinates were received from other members and non-members through their attached comments and amount of "likes". Facebook has been a useful ethnographic tool because it, like many other social media outlets, provide relevant up-to-the-minute data that is detailed, unobtrusively obtainable, and naturally occurring (Kozinets 2010:11). I used social media as a supplement to interviewing. The way people approach social situations and choose to communicate is quite different on the internet, particularly if on an anonymous forum, than in the physical world. I utilized anonymous Lolita forums (specifically the "Cosplay and Gothic Lolita" (CGL) board on 4Chan, and "Behind the Bows" (BtB) weekly forum on LiveJournal) to compare the data I compiled through interviews with unfiltered worldwide Lolita community opinion.

1.3.4 Shopping

Because the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is a fashion subculture, the clothing and accessories are the most important part of the culture. The community members utilize various online shopping methods to obtain their products and much of their social interaction includes talk about shopping experiences. Shopping services, Japanese 'Brand' shops, American and European indie brands, Etsy shops, virtual auctions, Chinese

replica shops, social media-based trading, and Facebook GOs (group orders) are the main methods of shopping for Lolita fashion.

Figure 1.3.1 Author in Sweet Lolita Coordinate.
Photo by Jesse Anderson.

In order to grasp how each of these shopping methods works, I utilized shopping as an ethnographic method. As part of my data collection, I purchased items through Japanese 'Brand' shops based in the United States, American and European indie brands, Etsy shops, and Chinese replica shops. I viewed each of these websites separately to determine their content, navigability, demographic (sub-style preference), ease of payment, and shipping time. I was unfamiliar with many of these shopping venues, so it was a challenge to learn how to use them. It was particularly difficult to navigate foreign brand shops whose websites are mostly in Japanese and Chinese replica shops and auction sites. Luckily, I participated in multiple interviews with members to discuss shopping methods. I also had the opportunity to sit with a few Lolitas while they conducted online shopping transactions. This made the shopping process much easier in

preparation for my further fieldwork where Lolita fashion was required (i.e. tea parties and particular themed meet-ups) and allowed for me to observe Lolita shopping habits.

1.3.5 Photography

Because the Lolita Fashion subculture is extremely visual in nature, Utilizing photography as a research method is a great way to learn about the community. Photography is a form of artistic expression and visual means of presenting social research (Byers 1964:79). They embody the personal concerns of the photographer (in this case, Lolita fashion) and become records that reproduce reality (Schwartz 1989:120). The photographs that I have utilized are meant to provide a realistic illustration of

Figure 1.3.2 Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Lolita fashion and examples of the various genres and sub-styles that are embraced by community members. This thesis includes pictures that I have taken at various events throughout my field work to demonstrate the social interaction among members of the Atlanta Lolita and

Japanese Street Fashion Community. These photographs also act as a visual comparison of 'brand' and indie-brand clothing and accessories. This thesis also includes photographs taken of both Baby the Stars Shine Bright models and indie brand models from the 2014 Anime Weekend Atlanta Fashion Show.

During each of the events that I attended throughout my research, I took multiple photographs of different coordinates and the interactions between members. The majority of these photographs were taken with either a smartphone or tablet. At some events, particularly the Annual brand-sponsored tea party at Anime Weekend Atlanta, I used a department-issued digital camera from the university. However, the photographs that I took with my smartphone turned out to be higher quality than those taken with the digital camera. It was quite easy to obtain verbal permission to take photos of members. I then digitally cataloged these photographs based

Figure 1.3.3 2014 Atlanta Lolita Formal Tea Party. Photo by Author.

on Lolita fashion sub-style (sweet, gothic, classic, Kodona, etc.) for future convenience. I then pulled out the specific photos relevant to certain themes in my research (use of social media, performance, etc.) which help to highlight my arguments.

I also actively observed the photographing of Lolitas at the events that I attended. I observed how they posed, how many photos were taken of each Lolita, if they were photographed independently, in pairs, or in groups, and other Lolitas' reactions to the photo-taking. I also observed the reaction to many of these photographs on social media (particularly Facebook, Behind the Bows, and Lolita Valentines). I made these observations in order to understand how Lolitas use photography, what types of photographs they aim to achieve, and how they react to each other's photographed coordinates.

1.3.6 Methodological Strengths

I chose to utilize these various ethnographic methods because they are powerful tools for data collection and the most relevant for the purposes of my research. Each of the methods I utilized have strengths. Semi-structured interviews allow for easy flow of conversation, a transfer of ideas, and open-ended conversation. The use of a general interview guide approach when conducting my interviews was useful to ensure that I covered specific areas of content with each participant, increasing conversation focus while allowing for adaptability.

Interviews, specifically those that take place face-to-face, are useful because the interviewer can take advantage of social cues such as body language, voice and intonation, etc., in order to supplement the answers given by the interview subject. Face-to-face interviews have the advantage of synchronous communication, allowing the interviewer and the interview subject to feed off of each other's opinions and comments and for the conversation to be more spontaneous (Opdenakker 2006). Face-to-face interviews can be recorded which is helpful for writing out notes and creating interview transcripts.

Participant observation is another method with significant strengths. This method allows the researcher to live the same experiences as the research subjects and gain an insider's perspective. Participant observation allows the researcher to gain access to communities and social groups who may otherwise not obtain consent if purely observing. This method also allows for a community to be observed in their natural setting and for openly recorded data. Participant observation permits for the collection of a wider range of data, reducing reactivity among members, and gaining an intuitive understanding of the meaning of data. This method is particularly useful for formulating research questions, avoiding self-reported data, and limiting researcher bias (Guest et al 2013:80-81).

Netnography, the ethnography of internet communities and study of internet behavior, is yet another useful ethnographic method. With online communities, unlike physical communities, it is much easier to obtain general data about the group and easily separate newer members from insiders based on community interaction. Netnography is often much faster, less expensive, and much simpler than traditional ethnography. It is immersive, descriptive, and allows for considerable adaptation for the researcher (Kozinets 2010). My use of social media and observation of anonymous forums fall nicely into the realm of netnography.

1.4 Limitations

Though these ethnographic methods are the most useful for the purposes of my research, they still have specific limitations. The limitations of a study, generally associated with design or methodology, greatly influence the interpretation of the resulting data. I interviewed a total of thirty members for my study, an adequate sample size to support my arguments. However, the community in which I work has nearly 450 members. Though thirty participants is an adequate

number for the purposes of my research, my data will not include the opinions of the entire community. The age range of my interview subjects is eighteen to sixty years of age. There are many community members under the age of eighteen whose valuable insight I am unable to include in the presentation of my research due to IRB (Institutional Review Board) restrictions. Lolita fashion has also grown into a worldwide phenomenon spanning six continents. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is only one community out of hundreds of Lolita fashion communities worldwide. Though my data closely reflects the Atlanta community, it may not apply to other Lolita fashion communities in the United States and worldwide. Each of the methods that I used to conduct my research has specific limitations. Face-to-face interviews, though they have many advantages to data collection, can be difficult to manage. These interviews can quickly diverge to unrelated conversation and result in extended interview time. There are also costs associated with face-to-face interviews as well, particularly costs for travel.

Participant observation, though the hallmark of ethnography, still has its limitations. There is a chance that the "observer effect" can occur[3]. Netnography is limited by its lack of face-to-face interaction. Though almost necessary to perform qualitative research with online communities, netnography is focused on what is witnessed and said online. Doing interviews through email and social media is useful because it allows for more constructed responses. However, digital interviews do not allow for useful spontaneous responses and flow of conversation. Digital interviews also do not allow the researcher to manage social cues which is a significant strength of face-to-face interviewing.

[3] http://wps.pearsoned.co.uk/ema_uk_he_plummer_sociology_3/40/10342/2647687.cw/content/. Last accessed on November 6, 2014.

1.5 Role and Experience as an Ethnographer

My role as an ethnographer has been professional, yet very laid back. I chose to enter the community with confidence, yet show my vulnerability as a person new to Lolita fashion. This allowed me to easily gain rapport with the community. Before meeting with the community for the first time, I was generally uninformed about the history and characteristics of the Lolita fashion subculture. Purposefully displaying this ignorance was useful for building initial relationships and learning about the fashion. Members were very eager to teach me about the different sub-styles of the fashion and the social politics surrounding the community. Through these relationships, I scheduled interviews to gain further information about the community and the fashion. I was also welcomed into the official online community. During interview sessions, often taking place at a private home or coffee shop, I used a pre-written interview guide. I also obtained audio recordings of the majority of the interviews when appropriate. After the conclusion of the interview, I digitally transcribed my interviews for future use.

At community events and meet-ups, I dressed in the fashion in order to be an active participant observer (I did not dress in Lolita for the majority of my interviews, however, in an attempt to established my place as a serious researcher). I participated in each aspect of the event, be it a tea party, luncheon, or shopping excursion. During these events, I split my time between conversing with members and gaining new insight into the Lolita fashion subculture, and keeping to myself and silently observing my surroundings and the interactions between members. Also during these events, I used a tablet to jot down names, terms, and observations I wanted to find more information about and use for the purposes of my research. I took multiple

photos during each event to archive my experience and use for future reference when writing my observation notes. These photographs are also significant for the creation of my thesis.

1.6 Role and Experience as a Member of the Community

To date, my role and experience as a member of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion community has been exciting and rewarding. However, it has also been a much larger financial commitment than I initially expected and has also become a source of personal anxiety. Since joining the community and assuming the role as an active member, I started to wear Lolita fashion to each meet-up and many non-community related events. I have been to multiple community events and meet-ups throughout the last year and have actively participated in each. The majority of the community members have been very friendly to me and have warmly welcomed me to each event that I have attended.

Becoming an active member of the community has been very rewarding. Because of my role as an ethnographer and member of the community, I was asked by the "Fashion-Track" coordinator of the 2014 Anime Weekend Atlanta convention to be a crew member and a significant participant in the planning of events associated with Lolita and other Japanese street fashions. This shows my dedication to the community and that my opinions are valued among its leading members. I have also made some very close friends through this research and my role as a member of the community. I have become particularly close with two of my key informants on the project.

Unfortunately, I have also had some negative experiences associated with being a member of the community. I was not initially aware of the financial commitment to the community. Much of Lolita fashion is quite expensive. Because I felt it necessary to wear Lolita

fashion as part of my active participant observation, I purchased six jumperskirts (JSK), two skirts, one blouse, two pairs of shoes, multiple headbows, four wigs, and too many accessories to count. Throughout my fieldwork, I have spent over two thousand dollars on Lolita. Because it tends to be frowned upon to wear the same coordinate to every event, I found it necessary to purchase the items to create various coordinates. This was a personal financial burden. This amount is quite small compared to Lolitas who have been members of the community for many years and who choose to only wear Japanese brands instead of indie brands and replica designs. During interviews, I learned that Lolitas spend quite a lot of money on clothing and accessories. I have even found that some Lolitas will spend thousands of dollars for just one sought-after retired print.

Aside from the financial commitment to the community, I also began to develop anxiety and image-issues as a result of being a member of the community. The community is fashion-based and largely based on conspicuous consumption. Members are very particular on what appropriate Lolita fashion looks like and what is does not. The online community is particularly harsh in regards to shaming members anonymously for their lack of fashion sense. Therefore, I began to develop anxiety before attending meet-ups and events, for fear that I would be negatively viewed by other members or spoken about on an anonymous Lolita forum (i.e. BtB and CGL).

Having provided a base for my research and having discussed the various theories that I have utilized in my writing, I now continue with my various observations and analyses. From here, I focus on three specific themes to illustrate the various ways in which Lolitas manage their impressions. These include community, both face-to-face and virtual, fashion (including cosplay and shopping), and photography. I begin by discussing my first field experience with the Atlanta

Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion community, followed by providing background information about the community in order to create a foundation for the remainder of the thesis.

2 COMMUNITY

I first became aware of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community through Kera, who I previously mentioned as a self-identified 'sweet' Lolita who is an active member in the community. After expressing my interests in Japanese popular culture and visual culture to her, she suggested that I look into researching Lolita fashion and the Atlanta Lolita Community in particular. I considered this person to be my key informant for my project. Kera was extremely helpful throughout the course of my research by providing me with a thorough introduction to Lolita fashion, giving me details about the Atlanta Lolita Community, and helping me gain access to the community and its events. She was particularly helpful with introducing me to other members of the community, which resulted in the expansion of my sample size through participant-driven sampling.

For my first attempt at entering the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community and building rapport, Kera invited me to an Asian-style karaoke meet-up at Karaoke Melody II in Doraville, Georgia. I had absolutely no idea what to expect. I had seen Lolitas in passing at anime conventions but had never taken the time to meet them or understand their fashion. Kera was very helpful in making me feel comfortable at the event and kindly introduced me to many of her Lolita friends. I was still uncomfortable, however, because I was not dressed in Lolita fashion like all of the other people in the room. Kera assured me that I had nothing to worry about since I was new to the community. Regardless, I sat quietly observing the men and women around me as they sang, drank, danced, and made conversation in the small dark room.

The music was booming and strobe lights were flashing. I felt as though I were in a daze while watching these beautiful people around me, yet still completely aware of my sloppy jeans and t-shirt. This made me feel quite uncomfortable and was a major factor in my decision to later have a Lolita-style outfit made for me.

After breaking out of my trance, I began to actively participate in the event. I tried to be friendly, funny, and vulnerable in order to help build ties to the Lolitas around me. I accomplished this by participating in the karaoke aspect of the meet-up. This was the first time in my life that I had sung karaoke. Along with Kera, we sang 'Barbie Girl' by Aqua as a duet to entertain the Lolitas around us. I sang the female vocal while she sang the male's part. We danced together and smiled gleefully throughout the entire song. This action made a significant impact on my building rapport with my future informants because they saw my willingness to belong and my positive interaction with one of their fellow Lolitas.

Figure 1.6.1 Country Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

After the Karaoke event was over, Kera and I were invited to dinner with some of the

Lolitas. We decided to eat at a Mexican restaurant nearby. After driving around aimlessly for fifteen minutes, we were informed via text message that the planned restaurant no longer existed. Kera and I met up with the other Lolitas in the dark parking lot in front of the abandoned store-front. After everyone arrived, we noticed we had two options in front of us for food. On one side of the parking lot, we saw a 24-hour Korean BBQ restaurant. On the other side, there was a Mexican restaurant in the basement of a strip club. We opted for the Korean place. We all walked over to the Korean BBQ restaurant, filed in excitedly, and sat down at large rectangular teppanyaki-style table. I sat at the head of the table which gave me easy exposure to all of the Lolitas down the table and put me in prime spot for conversation and observation. The after-karaoke dinner was the most informative and exciting aspect of my first field experience. It was here that I learned the most about the Lolita fashion subculture. I learned about the dynamics in the community, meet-ups, helpful websites to visit, the difference between brand and off-brand, etc. It was also during this dinner that I was able explain my research project to many of the members and was able to obtain more interview subjects for my research.

After making initial contact with the community during this event, I was even more intrigued by Lolita fashion and the sociocultural dynamics and interworkings of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. I had so many questions at this point. What is the history behind Lolita fashion? How did this Japanese fashion become so popular in Atlanta? How long has the community been around? What are the meet-ups like? These early questions I had only began to scratch the surface of the wide world of Lolita fashion subculture. This chapter provides the history and evolution of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. It discusses the community organization and provides information about its members as well as events, meet-ups and dynamics of the face-to-face and virtual communities. In this chapter, I also

discuss the community use of social media, and the use of anonymous forums as a form of policing.

2.1 History and Evolution of the Community

Lolita fashion is a synthesis Victorian era dress and Rococo costume that has incorporated elements of other Japanese street fashions including Visual Kei, Mori, Fairy Kei, Decora, and Cult Party Kei. Lolita fashion gained popularity on the streets of Tokyo, Japan in the early 1990s. The fashion was initially created with the emergence of Shōjo (literally meaning young/little woman) manga in the early 1950s. Lolita clothing did not gain popularity in Japan until Shōjo manga shifted from a demographic of young girls to a much wider and older audience in the 1970s (Hori, Hikari 2013). Though the concept was created in the 1950s, the Lolita clothing style was not commonly worn as a fashion until the early 1970s when only kurololi (all black Lolita style clothing) and shirololi (all white Lolita style clothing) were worn.

It was not until the early 1990s that Lolita fashion became much more individualistic and popular among youth groups and young adults in Japan. Though some Japanese street fashions developed earlier than the 1990s (like Visual Kei fashion which emerged in the 1980s as a result of popular Visual Kei glam-rock bands), many of the street fashion subcultures developed due to Japan's struggling economy and the youth's desire to stand out in an extremely homogenous and

Figure 2.1.1 Visual Kei Inspired Pirate Kodona[4]

conforming society (Kawamura 2012:4;7-11). Teens in Japan began to adopt more personalized styles of Lolita fashion, resulting in the creation of multiple styles and sub-styles of Lolita dress (Kawamura 2012:70-73). Other subcultures that emerged in Japan include gyaru and its multiple variations in Shibuya (ganguro, yamamba, mamba, and bamba), cosplay and anime/manga-related fashions in Akihabara, and mori girl in Kouenji (Kawamura 2012:41-47).

The fashion became popular in the United States in the early 2000s. With the rise in popularity of Japanese animation (anime) and Japanese comics (manga) in the west, Japanese culture was embraced by American youth. Characters dressed in Lolita fashion filled volumes of Shōjo manga and countless anime television shows and movies. Many of the members of the community whom I interviewed claimed that their first exposure to Lolita fashion was while watching Japanese anime or reading manga. Many members expressed that these shows and comics inspired them to either begin dressing in a similar fashion or peaked their interest in Japanese popular culture. This then lead members to pursue learning about different Japanese

[4] http://aerynsys.tumblr.com/. Last accessed November 11, 2014.

street fashions through the internet or through friends. Though members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community have many different stories on how they became interested in the fashion (i.e. Victorian dolls, pixel art, desire for an alternative fashion community, etc.), this phenomenon is the greatest contributor to the rise in popularity of Lolita fashion in Atlanta. Unlike the Japanese parasite-singles who rely on their parents for money and to help maintain their shopping habits, American Lolitas are much more independent. The majority of the Lolitas in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community are working students or degree-holding workers. There are some members who are in high school, do not work, and rely on their parents to support their Lolita fashion purchases, but this is certainly not the norm.

Figure 2.1.2 Casual Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

2.2 Community Members and Organization

The current members of the community range in age from sixteen to sixty years old. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is an all-inclusive organization and welcomes men and women of any age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual preference to

participate. The majority of the community members are women. However, there are some very active male members of the community. The majority of the members wear traditional female Lolita dresses and jumperskirts. Some of the members, however, choose to dress in traditionally male Ōji/Kodona style fashion which is often called shounen-kei, or “boystyle” in the Lolitasphere. This style is often worn by men, but also sometimes worn by women in the community. There are also some male members of the community who choose to wear traditional female Lolita clothing and accessories. These members are known as “Brolitas”.

Figure 2.2.1 Gothic Ōji/Kodona Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Lolitas choose their personal Lolita style for various different reasons. Though not mutually exclusive, many younger members will dress in sweet Lolita because it emphasizes their youth, while older members often times feel uncomfortable wearing the infantilized look of sweet coordinates and will opt for the classic or gothic Lolita style. Because Lolita fashion is quite expensive, Lolitas tend to stick to one particular style and build their wardrobe around it.

Figure 2.2.2 Infantilized Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

There seems to be a slight rift between Lolitas who wear sweet coordinates and those who wear gothic and classic coordinates. Those Lolitas who wear gothic and classic often argue that sweet Lolita is too childish and utilizes unflattering colors like pastel pink and lavender. These Lolitas also argue that wearing sweet Lolita coordinates to work or to non-Lolita events is very difficult and uncomfortable because they are very noticeable and deviate wildly from any mainstream popular clothing of today. Classic and gothic Lolitas take pride in their coordinates and often feel as though they can wear casual versions of their coordinates to non-Lolita events, public places, and to work and school without feeling uncomfortable. As I mentioned previously, many younger members will dress in sweet Lolita while older members will dress in classic or gothic. The rift between the two styles is also likely to be related to the age difference between members.

Up until mid-October, 2013, the community was headed by Affrilliation, INC., an Atlanta-based corporation dedicated to promoting the American Lolita scene both locally and in

the United States. Affrilliation, INC. was the parent organization behind 'Frill', a yearly Lolita convention held in Atlanta, as well as the Anime Weekend Atlanta Pop-Up Lolita Boutique and numerous other local events[5]. Affrilliation, INC. was formed by seven very dedicated Atlanta-based women in 2010. Unfortunately, it was dissolved due to the inability to fund a third annual 'Frill' Lolita convention. Though Affrilliation INC.'s dissolution came as a surprise to much of the community, the tightly-knit group is confident that the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community will remain strong and prosperous in their desires to promote and raise awareness of Lolita fashion in Atlanta and to be a place for shared interest and self-expression.

Since the dissolution of Affrilliation, INC., many community members voiced their desire to elect new moderators for the organization. These moderators are responsible for the facilitation of group discussion, admitting new members, running the official Facebook page and other social media sources, mediating between members, and helping the community run smoothly. In February 2014, an election was held to choose new community moderators. Nominations were made and twelve individuals ran for moderator positions. Out of the twelve, five moderators were chosen. They are comprised of four women and one man. Three of the women were past Affrilliation INC. moderators. Aside from the occasional annual special event, the community members (not the elected moderators) are responsible for creating, organizing, and managing their own meet-ups. Information about these meet-ups is posted on Facebook.

[5] http://affrilliation.com/. Last accessed on October 13, 2013.

2.3 Events, Meet-ups, and the Face-to-Face Community

The Atlanta Lolitas have meet-ups in public locations which gain a lot of attention from surrounding individuals, often non-members who are unfamiliar with Lolita or any other Japanese street fashions. These meet-ups are usually held at public parks, city squares, cafes, restaurants, or shopping venues. Meeting at these locations which are frequented by many people each day, the Lolitas are aware that their fashion, being so different than popular American fashions of today, will gain a lot of attention. Based on my interviews and observations, many Lolitas happily accept when people ask to take photographs of them. However, they do get upset when people sneak photos without permission. As I explain later in this ethnography, many Lolitas are very vocal about this at meet-ups and some will even confront their offenders.

The community has also been featured in various parades, fashion walks, and performance-based events in Atlanta where they purposefully display themselves for others to observe and raise awareness of the community and the fashion style. Each year, the Lolitas walk in the annual DragonCon parade to promote their fashion and be seen by the Atlanta community. They also have a yearly event called “Going in for the Kill in Frills!!” held at the Little Five Points Halloween Parade and Festival. Here, the Lolitas walk in the parade equipped with signs that read “ATL Lolitas”, “PUNK, CLASSIC, SWEET, HIME”, and “The Fashion, Not the Book”.

The Lolitas also participate in “Fashion Walks”. These are based after the popular Harajuku Fashion Walks in the Harajuku neighborhood of Tokyo, Japan. The community participated in fashion walks at the 2012 and 2013 Frill Lolita conventions, and holds them yearly at Anime Weekend Atlanta. During these events, the Lolitas walk around in public

displaying their fashions, again, often with signs that indicate the community name and disassociation with Nabokov's Book, *Lolita* (Nabokov 1955).

Figure 2.3.1 Going in for The Kill in Frill's Meet-up. Photo Courtesy of Keana Ragesdale. Photography by Unknown.

Nabokov's *Lolita* depicts the emotional and sexual relationship between thirty-seven-year-old Humbert Humbert and twelve-year-old Dolores Haze. Humbert uses the term "Lolita" to refer to Dolores. The term has also entered into popular culture referring to an underage and sexually precocious female. Members of the Lolita Fashion community deny any connection to this archetype, though their self-infantilization speaks otherwise. Some Lolitas do engage in age-play practices and wear youthful-looking coordinates. However, the portion of the community that identifies with this popularized archetype seems quite small. Regarding the fashion, the "sweet" Lolita aesthetic is by far the closest to this popular archetype. Other sub-styles of Lolita fashion draw on Victorian, Rococo, or gothic aesthetics, among others.

The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community hosts a few fashion shows throughout the year, the largest of which occurs at Anime Weekend Atlanta. The fashion shows are typically separated into two parts: Japanese brand fashions (sometimes including visual kei and punk fashions) and indie Lolita fashions. The brand fashions section is often hosted by the

brand itself or by an authorized distributor and is one of the most anticipated events of the year. The indie fashions section brings in indie designer fashions from all over the United States. These clothes are often available for sale after the show in the convention "dealer's room".

The face-to-face community, though not as active as the virtual community, is thriving with nearly one meet-up each weekend and special events throughout the year. Aside from the occasional annual special event, the community members are responsible for creating, organizing, and managing their own meet-ups. Information about these meet-ups is posted on Facebook. Non-members are happily invited to meet-ups and events. However, it is proper Lolita etiquette to ask permission of the hostess before bringing friends, significant others, and non-members. Many events take place at private residences or locations with pre-arranged seating. Because of this, it is also proper for a meet-up or event attendee to RSVP on the Facebook event page as soon as possible. This is also to make sure the host or hostess has adequate time for preparation. A meet-up that I recently attended was the cupcake meet-up at a fellow member's home. She made it clear on the Facebook event page that she expected each member bake their own cupcakes instead of buying them premade from a store or bakery, though some members disregarded this rule. She emphasized that practicing proper Lolita etiquette was particularly important at this event because it was much smaller and much more intimate than a large-scale gathering.

Figure 2.3.2 Cupcake Meet-up. Photo Courtesy of Tiffany Chesney. Photography by unknown.

2.4 Virtual Community and Social Media

The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community thrives as a face-to-face community but also as a vibrant virtual community. During an interview we conducted at our university, Kera explained the various ways in which the community utilized the internet and social media by going to each website and giving me an in-depth description of each site and how Lolitas use it. During this process, Kera was dressed in casual Lolita, which was very common for her to wear on school days. Casual Lolita style is a toned-down version of Lolita fashion which will often replace a blouse with a t-shirt and Lolita shoes with sneakers. I on the other hand, had not fully embraced Lolita into my everyday wardrobe. On this particular day, I was wearing leggings with black bloomers and a t-shirt. Kera concluded that my attempt could be considered casual kodona Lolita. Kodona Lolita is boystyle Lolita that is identified by the knickerbockers or shorts, dark colorway, vests, and headware such as top hats, bowler hats, and tricornes.

During our conversation, Kera explained that the community utilizes Facebook for the majority of its organizational and communication needs. It also maintains the Atlanta EGL (elegant gothic Lolita) Community Journal on LiveJournal. Many members also utilize unaffiliated Lolita-based websites and forums including the CGL board on 4chan, 'Behind the Bows' and 'Lolita Valentines' on LiveJournal, and numerous Lolita shopping sites. Frequently used shopping sites include Japanese 'Brand' shops, Bodyline (off-brand clothing and accessories), and Taobao (Chinese auction site). Other recent popular sites utilized by many Atlanta Lolitas include 'Lacebook', a social network and photo sharing site for Lolitas, and LaceMarket, an online marketplace for new and second-hand Lolita Fashion.

Bethany explained the origins of the virtual Atlanta Lolita Community. It was established as a formal internet-based organization through LiveJournal on February 10th, 2005 when there were only a few dozen active members, including herself. She informed me that "the community made the switch from LiveJournal to Facebook on July 22, 2010. When we started using Facebook, membership skyrocketed and today we have nearly four hundred members [as of December 4th, 2014, there are nearly 450 members]". Facebook, which is operated by five moderators, is used by members for many things. It is used for the organization of meet-ups and display of meet-up information including time, date, location, attire, etc. It is often used by members to discuss who is bringing which dishes to potluck style meet-ups. The Facebook page is also frequently used as a forum for members to make sales posts and advertise commissions. It is however, courteous to refrain from making these posts more than once a week in order to maintain a clutter free "wall".

Past moderators and influential members created written guidelines and etiquette for the community which is available on Facebook for all members to view. Aside from the face-to-face

guidelines and etiquette specific to meet-ups, the majority of the document outlines rules for online interaction. Members are aware that what is posted on the Facebook page reflects the community as a whole. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Community aims to uphold a respectable online reputation. It is proper etiquette for members to respect each other and act maturely when posting on the page and to ask permission before tagging or sharing another member's photos.

New members are encouraged to join the online community. However, each prospective member must submit a group request through Facebook and send a private message to one or more of the moderators stating why he or she would like to join the community. This precaution is taken primarily to eliminate any people who are unsure of the nature of the community and believe that it is somehow related to Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel, "Lolita", or that it is an ageplay community. The community aims to separate themselves from these ideas. On the Atlanta EGL Community Journal, the first line in the "about" section states, "First off, *we are not a community for Nabokov fans*. Sorry!"[6]. New members are encouraged to view to the community Guidelines and Etiquette before contributing to the face-to-face or online community.

The Atlanta EGL Community Journal was the first online presence for the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. First established in 2005, this page thrived until the creation of the community Facebook page on July 22, 2010. This community journal included information about upcoming meet-ups and events as well as an archive of photographs and 'memories' from past events. This site has since seen little activity, though occasionally it will

[6] http://atl-lolitas.livejournal.com/. Last accessed October 21, 2014.

draw interest of prospective members who are then redirected to the Facebook page. It seems that this community journal site it maintained as an archive and for nostalgic purposes for early community members. To date, there have been nearly five hundred journal entries and over five thousand comments. I assume that this is far less than the fast growing Facebook community.

2.4.1 Anonymous Forums

One of the most popular uses of social media in the Lolita fashion world is photosharing. Photosharing is by far one of the most common activities for Lolitas on the internet. Some Lolitas also enjoy posting and photosharing on anonymous community forums. These anonymous forums act as a form of policing in the community and often violate members' carefully-managed impressions. The popular unaffiliated Lolita forums that are frequently utilized by members of the community are CGL on 4chan, and Behind the Bows (BtB) on LiveJournal. 4chan, influenced by Japan's popular "2chan", is an image-based bulletin board created by Christopher Poole ("Moot") in 2003. 4chan is a largely unfiltered and loosely moderated site where people all over the world can anonymously post comments and share images. 4chan is described as vitriolic and misanthropic by many of its active users. The site is comprised of "boards" which focus on particular types of media or shared interest. These boards tend to have their own communal values and culture and reside under one of six sections: Japanese Culture, Interests, Creative, Adult, Other, and Miscellaneous[7]. One of the boards under the Japanese Culture section is titled "Cosplay and EGL" commonly referred as CGL, its 4chan forum code. This board is used by members to ask questions regarding cosplay and Lolita

[7] http://www.4chan.org/. Last accessed on April 26, 2014.

fashion, to discuss shopping venues, and to anonymously either praise or shame other Lolitas and cosplayers (costume players) by posting photographs or comments.

Like CGL on 4chan, "Behind the Bows" (BtB) is an anonymous forum. However, unlike CGL, BtB is housed on LiveJournal and submissions ("secrets") are collected throughout the week and posted by the moderators every Saturday night or early Sunday morning. BtB has rigid rules on secret submissions unlike CGL. Images cannot surpass 640X640 pixels in size, images

please, your coord is hideous
stick with fairy kei
none of these colors match?? people only like you because you're popular on tumblr
I used to think you were an inspiration to nonbinary people into japanese fashion but you're actually really self centered and rude
please stay out of lolita (:

Figure 2.4.1 Example #1 of an Anonymous Post on Behind the Bows[8]

must pertain to the Lolita subculture only, personal information cannot be included (names, usernames, contact information, etc.), links must not be included in the image, faces must be blurred out or obscured in some way, text must be in English, secrets cannot make a threat of physical harm to an individual or group, and no secrets pertaining to sexual fantasies with specific people is allowed[9]. BtB, created on January 17, 2012, seems to be the cause of many issues among members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. Because of this, members are encouraged to refrain from posting on this site. According to the Guidelines

[8] http://behind-the-bows.livejournal.com/83435.html. Last accessed November 12, 2014.
[9] http://behind-the-bows.livejournal.com/. Last accessed on October 16, 2014.

and Etiquette for the community, though the community cannot ban members from using these sites, those who post in BtB or CGL are not highly regarded within the community.

Even though posting on these anonymous forums is frowned upon in the community, following these forums, particularly BtB, is still a weekly ritual for many community members. Every Friday night or early Saturday morning, new secrets are posted on BtB that have been collected by the moderators throughout the week and Lolitas have the ability to comment anonymously on the photos. The most common posts are those which contain a photo of a Lolita with his or her face blurred out, complete with accompanied text scrutinizing the person in the photo and their coordinate. Lolitas anonymously comment on these photos and either agree with the original poster or defend the Lolita in the photograph. Because of these anonymous forums, community members have developed a fear of being the recipient of these comments. This, again, is the primary reason why Lolitas are consciously image-focused and carefully monitor the impression they give off to their community. These anonymous forums have become a form of policing in the community. Lolitas fear that they must have the perfect coordinates (preferably brand), flawless make-up, a tiny waist, skinny legs, and high-quality photographs on social media or else they will be policed by the community and posted to Behind the Bows.

I do not understand why obese people wear lolita.
Why spend that much time and money on clothes? You clearly do not really care at all about your body or your appearance.
A lump of lard with cute clothes is still just a lump of lard - and lard is not cute at all.

Figure 2.4.2 Example #2 of an Anonymous Post on Behind the Bows.[10]

My key informant, Kera, shared her fears of this anonymous policing. She explained that she had been a member of the community for many years and had felt slightly concerned that she may be posted to BtB one day. She tried to present her best coordinates at meet-ups where her photo may be taken so that there would be no unflattering pictures circulating on the internet. Kera told me that "a few years ago, a photo of me and another girl in the comm was posted to BtB. The OP (original poster) was bitching about the girl I was with and complaining about our coordinates". From this point forward, Kera was much more concerned about the visuals of her coordinates and began to have this feeling of unease and fear about community policing. She did not ever find out who posted about her on BtB. Kera fearfully admitted that "the anonymous poster could be a Lolita I've never met, or could have been my best friend". Kera has to manage her impression very closely in every situation because she is never sure when someone she is around may post a photo of her on an anonymous forum. The panopticon can be applied to the

[10] http://behind-the-bows.livejournal.com/76078.html. Last accessed November 12, 2014.

Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community and their fear of policing on anonymous forums. The anonymous posters on these internet forums such as BtB and 4chan act as the guards in the panopticon, and the community members are the prisoners. The community itself *is* a panopticon. Members are constantly fearful of being punished, therefore they choose to practice endless impression management and are always on their best behavior for fear of being posted to anonymous forums.

Figure 2.4.3 Example #3 of an Anonymous Post on Behind the Bows[11]

The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is multifaceted and thriving as both a face-to-face and virtual community. The community has evolved over the past decade to have nearly 450 members and has grown to become a complex organization with an intricate political structure and set rules and regulations. The community's existence on multiple social media outlets and their many events and meet-ups demonstrates how members congregate and organize, as well as and how they interact with each other. This understanding of the

[11] http://behind-the-bows.livejournal.com/79717.html. Last accessed November 15, 2014.

community's structure is necessary to pave the way for analyzing how fashion and photography influence the art of impression management in the Lolita fashion subculture.

3 THE FASHION OF FRILL

3.1 Visuals of Lolita Fashion

Members of Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community are first and foremost connected through a mutual interest in Lolita fashion. The beautiful clothing and accessories are what initially draws members to the community. In this chapter, I argue that Lolitas choose specific clothing and accessories in order to create and manage their impression. I examine the different visuals of Lolita fashion and explain the use of each of the major pieces in a typical Lolita coordinate and how these either contribute to or detract from one's impression management. I continue with a section on cosplay fashions and discuss the Lolitas' general

Figure 3.1.1 Classic Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

dislike for the incorporation of cosplay in Lolita fashion and how this negatively influences a Lolita's impression to other community members. In this chapter I also discuss the process of Lolita online shopping and highlight the various shopping methods including Facebook buying, selling, and trading, indie and replica shops, and the brand shopping experience. Here, I show how the utilization of different shopping methods can increase a Lolita's social capital, thus influencing his or her impression. I then add to this chapter with an ethnographic illustration of the interworkings of a Lolita fashion show and illustrate the preference of brand clothing over indie clothing in Lolita fashion.

Lolita fashion is extraordinarily eye-catching, with each frill and accessory adding to the overall delicate essence of the coordinate. Each piece of the coordinate has a purpose, be it utilitarian or aesthetic. Each of these elements either add or take-away from the overall impression that a Lolita gives off to her or his community members. In addition to my own personal observations and hours scouring the internet, I also conducted multiple interviews to learn about Lolita fashion. My most insightful and thorough interview regarding specific clothing and accessories was with a Lolita named Amanda. Amanda is in her late twenties and identifies as both sweet and classic Lolita. She limits herself to mostly brand clothing and has self-labeled herself a 'brandwhore'. Amanda works in security sales and is studying computer science at a local university. She claims that she spends the much of her income on brand clothing and accessories. The first time that I met Amanda, she was wearing a complete Angelic Pretty set. She even received a comment from another girl at the meet-up, "Wow! If you wear that outfit to a tiny meet-up like this, I can't imagine what you will wear to a big tea party!"

Figure 3.1.2 Gothic Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Members of the Lolita subculture utilize fashion to express themselves and to communicate with their fellow community members. Subculture groups and larger social groups communicate their collective identity to others through fashion (Barnard 1996: 56). Fashion is an effective tool of communication between and within different culture groups, most often providing information about a specific person or group. Fashion is both individual and collective. There are a few basic Lolita fashion elements that allow members to identify with each other. Aside from being used as a method of self-expression, the elements that a member chooses to wear and how they choose to elaborate on them communicates their economic status and social class, personality, sexual preference, character, political position, etc. to others around them (Finkelstein 1999:376; Kuruc 2008:198). These typical Lolita pieces include the jumperskirt, one piece dress (OP), or skirt, the petticoat, the headbow or headdress, socks or tights, blouse, shoes, and wig. Each of these elements has a purpose. The jumperskirt, OP, or skirt is clearly the most important element of the coordinate. Without the base piece, all other elements seem pointless. All other elements that I list later in

Figure 3.1.3 Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

the chapter are designed to enhance the Lolita aesthetic in one way or another, though some Lolitas argue that they are necessary. However, in order for a coordinate to be considered "Lolita", one must be wearing a Lolita-style jumperskirt, OP, or skirt. Of the three, jumperskirts are by far the most common. A jumperskirt is a dress with sleeveless sholderstraps. Jumperskirts, along with OPs often have shirring in the back which allows for the garment to fit multiple bust sizes. They also commonly have waist ties which help form a slimmer-looking waistline and to form a pretty bow in the back.

The petticoat is used to create the shape of the dress and provide the beautiful Lolita-esque silhouette. According to my interviewee, Amanda, "there are two major petticoat types, the "cupcake", and the "A-line" shape. Cupcake petticoats are usually worn with sweet Lolita prints, and A-line petticoats are mostly used with classic or gothic Lolita prints". Many Lolitas argue that someone is not a "true" Lolita if they are not wearing a petticoat with their coordinate. This is a commonly posted critique on anonymous forums. Amanda freely admits to posting a photo on BtB of a Lolita in the community who was not wearing a petticoat to a meet-up. She

equipped the photo with the words, “where is her petticoat? She looks like a giant sack of potatoes!”

In addition to the dress and petticoat which are necessary to create the Lolita style and shape, common accessories are also worn. The most common accessory is the headbow or headdress. Headbows are by far the more common of the two. These headpieces are typically made of the same fabric as the dress and sit either centered on the head or tilted slightly. Sweet Lolitas tend to wear the headbows centered on their head to achieve a more youthful look, while classic and gothic Lolitas tend to wear theirs tilted to the sides. Headbows range in size from small, slender bows that lay close to the head, to extra-large sized which are referred to as “head-eating bows”. Headdresses, in contrast, are less common, yet still worn by some Lolitas. Headdresses were very popular among Lolitas in the 1990s and early 2000s and saw a drastic downfall in popularity around 2010. Amanda claimed members of the community came to refer to this style of headwear as “maxi-pad headdresses”, referring to their shape. Regardless of the stigma attached to headdresses, there seems to have been a slight resurgence in the last few months.

Another accessory that Amanda argues is necessary for all wearers of the fashion is socks or tights. Tights and over-the-knee socks are the most common legwear and can range in a variety of styles and colors. Lolitas are very particular about their tights and choose them carefully to match their coordinate. Many Lolitas like to wear tights with lace or images that reflect their coordinate style or other matching accessories. For example, Amanda, a veteran member of the community, was wearing a pink sweet Lolita coordinate with heart-shaped accessories. Her tights were also pink and had dark pink hearts in a variety of sizes covering the front of each leg. The integration of small ornate details like these are the mark of a seasoned

Figure 3.1.4 Wardrobe Post of Socks and Tights[12]

Lolita. In addition to tights and over-the-knee socks, some Lolitas wear short ankle-high socks (bobby socks) with their coordinates. These socks are much less common, most likely due to the fact that they are often referred to as "sissy socks" by some members of the community. They are generally frowned upon because they are commonly worn by both babies, and adult age-players (adults who dress as a different age, either younger or older, often interacting in sexual activity). Again, here is another example of Lolitas trying to distance themselves from Nabokov's book. Amanda claimed that she would never be seen wearing sissy socks. She will only wear full-length tights because she believes anything else looks too child-like. She also stated that the girls who wear short socks (and sometimes knee-high socks) often get mocked by others on BtB or get teased behind their back.

Blouses are also a necessary component of the Lolita wardrobe according to many Lolitas. Blouses are worn under jumperskirts or with skirts. They are not worn with OPs. Lolita blouses typically have either short puffy sleeves, or long sleeves and are often made of either chiffon, cotton, lace, or silk. Lolitas aim to have very ornate blouses with multiple layers of

[12] http://egl.livejournal.com/19510834.html. Last accessed November 12, 2014.

ruffles and many decorative buttons. Amanda argues that a coordinate must have a blouse, while others argue that it does not. From my observations on global and regional Lolita forums, it seems as though it is much more acceptable to not wear a blouse in warmer states and countries. For example, many Lolitas in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community feel as though wearing a jumperskirt without a blouse in July is completely acceptable. European Lolitas, in contrast, may not agree because they do not experience the same high temperatures. I have noticed this difference multiple times through the posts on anonymous forums and on Facebook's Closet of Frills page.

Shoes are slightly different in that Lolitas can be very flexible with their footwear. It is important when wearing a Lolita coordinate to wear shoes that match and fit the general aesthetic. However, since Lolita meet-ups often involve lengthy conventions, or extended periods of standing and walking, Lolitas seem to be quite forgiving if a member's shoes are not from a Lolita-specific brand. Many members, including Amanda, wear shoes that they bought at local mass-retailers instead of Japanese brand or Japanese off-brand Lolita shops. Some Lolitas even wear tennis-shoes with their coordinates if they are going for a punk or casual Lolita style. In order to forgo the pain at the end of the convention weekend at AWA this year, Amanda opted to wear decorative ballerina flats that matched both her gothic Lolita coordinate and sweet Lolita coordinate. She claims that though she did not receive any compliments on her shoes, she did not receive any negative backlash either.

Many Lolitas choose to wear wigs while others prefer to wear their natural hair with their coordinates. It is very common for sweet Lolitas to wear wigs, while classic Lolitas tend to prefer the natural look. Overall, however, it is more common to see Lolitas wear wigs than wear their natural hair. Amanda prefers to wear her natural hair instead of wigs. However, she has

experienced negative remarks from other members in person and on BtB for this choice. Amanda stated that a photo was posted of her a few years ago on BtB with the words “When did Lolitas

Figure 3.1.5 Indie Gothic Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

stop wearing wigs? Natural hair just DOESN’T look good in Lolita” stamped below her face. Again, because of this stigma, many Lolitas choose wigs instead of their natural hair.

Wigs range in a variety of shapes, colors, and lengths. Lolitas tend to wear more natural-colored wigs and shy away from bright colors for fear that they will be incorporating cosplay elements into their coordinates. Lolitas tend to wear longer wigs with a slight curl rather than short and straight wigs. It is also very common to see members wearing wigs with bangs. Having bangs is almost essential to creating the perfect Lolita look because bangs, according to Amanda, give off the impression of innocence. Bangs are also very common in Japanese culture, where more women tend to have bangs than not. Wigs and hair, along with each of the other elements add to the overall Lolita aesthetic.

Members of subculture groups accomplish collective and individual identity through the display of specific ‘signs’ (i.e. safety pins, decorative jackets, ornate hair pieces, themed t-shirts,

etc.) These signs are imaginary and are only deemed significant because the subculture group has placed a value on them (Barthes 1990:9). Jumperskirts, OPs, blouses, headwear and legwear are all signs that come together to form a general aesthetic of the Lolita fashion subculture. The Lolita subculture group adopts these signs in order to differentiate themselves from the mainstream and identify with each other. These are elements of outward expression and style, suggesting that the display of certain items or 'signs' that a group wears can be used to set themselves apart from popular mainstream society (Hebdige 1979:3-4). Signs, in this case, elements of Lolita fashion, are carefully chosen by the member to produce a certain image that they want portrayed to others, thus managing their impression.

3.1.1 Cosplay

As I have illustrated above, there are many necessary elements that come together to form the proper Lolita aesthetic. There are, however, elements of Japanese fashions that are often shunned in the Lolita community, particularly anything pertaining to cosplay. There are a couple of reasons for this. Cosplay has become a popular practice in the anime and Japanese popular culture communities across the world. Lolita fashion, because it is a Japanese street fashion, often times has events at the same conventions that cosplayers attend. Because cosplay is much more common, bystanders at conventions often assume that Lolita fashion is a form of cosplay rather than a separate street fashion. Lolitas become very offended when they hear the words, "I love your cosplay! Who are you supposed to be?" and sometimes react harshly.

Cosplay is often viewed as a type of performance to the Lolitas. Many view cosplay as a hobby that people enjoy on weekends and that is very versatile. Cosplayers can perform a different character at each convention and may or may not feel a deep connection to that

character, creating an intentional performance. In contrast, the wearing of Lolita fashion is an example of performativity, rather than performance. Performativity is the process of repeated acts of naturalization (Butler 1999:xv) which alter reality. The wearing of Lolita is not a performance, but rather an expression of what Lolitas already feel themselves to be. By wearing the specific Lolita fashion items, members cause their outward appearance to match their inward identity. Lolitas are expressing their own personal identity, not that of a character. Their clothing is not a costume, but rather a compilation of hand-selected items meant express his or her personality.

My first exposure to Lolita culture was a couple of years before I even began to consider researching the subculture for my graduate research. At the university where I received my undergraduate degree, there was a girl who wore Lolita fashion every single day to campus. At the time, I did not know that it was Lolita fashion. My only exposure to anything similar had been with cosplay, so I assumed that that was what I was observing. One day, as I was sitting in the computer lab of the business building, the girl with the funny clothing sat down at the computer next to me. By this point, she had become a campus institution. Everyone knew who she was and I was determined to finally meet her. Struggling for words, I eventually spat out, "I love your outfit, I wish I had the balls to cosplay every day!" The Lolita looked at me with rage in her eyes and sternly said, "Its. NOT. Cosplay." I turned back to my computer and sat silently scrolling through Facebook for a couple of minutes before grabbing my things and hurriedly walking out of the room. It was not until I began my thesis research that I learned about Lolita fashion and began to understand this common faux pas.

Aside from the constant confusion between cosplay and Lolita fashion, most Lolitas, including Amanda, are vehemently against incorporating cosplay elements into Lolita fashion. In

the interview, Amanda explained that offending cosplay elements include “bright colored wigs, animal ears, tails, cosplay-related props like swords or capes, and non-Lolita prints that reflect a particular anime television show, film, or video game”. On multiple occasions, I have seen posts on BtB slandering Lolitas for wearing cosplay items with their coordinate. Amanda recalled a post made of a Lolita wearing cat ears with her coordinate. The original poster submitted the photo with the words, “get your cosplay shit out of our comm!” The fashion restrictions and policing of Lolita through anonymous forums, particularly regarding cosplay fashions, make it very difficult to incorporate personal style into coordinates and ultimately restrict the ability for self-expression and impression management.

3.2 Online Shopping

In a separate interview with a Lolita named Janelle, I was able to learn about the various shopping methods of Lolita, how each of them work, and the social context surrounding them in the community. Janelle is a Nigerian-born Lolita in her early thirties. She identifies as a kodona Lolita and enjoys cross-dressing. She also identifies as a ‘lifestyle’ Lolita who wears the fashion every day, both at home, and in public. She works in social media management and has lived all around the world throughout her life, which gives her a particularly good grasp on global online shopping. In order to adhere to the strict Lolita aesthetic, most Lolitas restrict their shopping to specific Lolita-friendly venues that hope to ensure their validity as a Lolita in the community. There are many different shopping venues that Lolitas utilize to obtain their clothing and accessories. These venues include Japanese ‘brand’ shops, indie design shops, Etsy and Storenvy shops, and Taobao. Janelle claims that the most prestigious of these venues are the Japanese ‘Brand’ shops. These shops, many of which began in or around Tokyo, produce dresses, skirts,

blouses, Jumperskirts, and accessories that often act as a model for indie brands and replica shops. These pieces tend to be reserved for Japanese sized men and women, limiting their demographic and excluding many Western buyers. The most popular Japanese brands among American Lolitas are Angelic Pretty, Baby the Stars Shine Bright, Alice and the Pirates, Moi Meme Moitie, Metamorphose Temps de Fille, Mary Magdalene, Innocent World, Juliette et Justine, h. NAOTO, and Emily Temple Cute. These brands are generally very expensive compared to off-brand and hand-made clothing. Japanese brand skirts, dresses, and jumper-skirts can range from a few hundred dollars to a couple thousand dollars. During a panel discussion that I attended at the Middle Tennessee Anime Convention, one of the presenting Lolitas stressed that one goal of wearing Lolita fashion is to try to look as expensive as possible. Japanese brand items provide this expensive look for followers of the fashion. Unfortunately for Janelle, she does not fit into the Japanese-sized mold that brand shops adhere by, so she is unable to wear brand clothing. She also feels that brand clothing is far too expensive for her to afford. Janelle feels as though her inability to wear brand clothing hinders her life as a Lolita and keeps her from achieving what she believes is the proper Lolita aesthetic. Janelle does state however

> Even though I can't wear brand, I can still have awesome custom stuff made for me. Like, 'Elegy' is amazing...You can just give her your measurements and your idea, then she draws up something for you. She doesn't charge extra for plus-size either...She works through Facebook too, which is always nice….With customer service like hers, why would anyone ever wear brand?"

In an attempt to combat the restrictions of Japanese brand shopping, particularly the size limitation and the expense, indie Lolita brands began to pop up across the United States, Europe, and parts of East Asia. Many of these indie shops allow for custom sizing in order to

Figure 3.2.1 Popular Indie Brand, Elegy[13]

accommodate larger bust size, longer torso, and larger waist than the average Japanese man or woman. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community has a particularly high concentration of indie Lolita designers. Some of these local indie brands include The Snow Field, Megan Maude, and My Dearest Victoria. Some very popular regional and global indie brands include Elegy Clothing based out of Ohio, Lady Sloth based out of Poland, and Haenuli based out of South Korea. Janelle relies on indie clothing brands for her Lolita clothing needs. She argues that indie brands are much more affordable, customizable, and just as beautiful as brand clothing and accessories. Though Janelle loves the pieces that she has purchased or commissioned from indie designers, she feels that her inability to wear brand clothing limits her popularity in the community.

Some Lolitas also buy their clothing and accessories from Etsy and Storenvy shops. These shops are internet-based venues for indie designers and small businesses to sell their products. These shopping venues allow for customers to shop directly from designers instead of going through a third party distributor. Since the emergence of these sites, which are free to use

[13] http://www.elegyclothing.com/. Last accessed November 12, 2014.

both for the shop owner and the consumer, it has become much easier for indie designers and small businesses to reach the public and promote their products. Many Lolitas with whom I have spoken, like Janelle, prefer to support small businesses rather than buy from large brand-named shops. However, there also seems to be a general consensus that products sold on these websites can be much lower in quality. A notion has been established that clothing and accessories purchased on Etsy or Storenvy shops are lower in quality.

Taobao is another popular virtual shopping venue for Lolitas. Taobao, comparable to America's eBay, was founded in 2003 and is based out of China. This customer-to-customer trading platform has over eight million registered users in China alone (Ou and Davison 2009:145). The majority of the website is written in Chinese and unfortunately, there is not an English alternative for the site. Janelle claims that Taobao is extremely popular among Lolitas because it is very inexpensive compared to Japanese brand clothing, accessories, and many comparable US products. The pricing for these products is listed in Chinese Yuan as well. For example, a quality Lolita jumperskirt may be listed on Taobao for ¥250. Based on today's exchange rate (4/23/2014), ¥250 exchanges to $40.08 US dollars. This exchange rate makes the jumperskirt very inexpensive compared to a Japanese brand or indie brand Jumperskirt. This is even much cheaper than the majority of used products I have seen posted on Lolita sales pages. Many Lolitas find Taobao difficult to navigate. Purchasing products off of Taobao is actually praised in the community, resulting in members bragging that they "got this off Taobao!"

The utilization of different shopping methods will either increase or decrease a Lolita's prestige in the community. This will also either negatively or positively influence the impression that he or she gives off to other members. The online world of Lolita fashion shopping is vast and varied with many options to fit different sizes, shapes, and pocketbooks. Though there are

many ways to shop and numerous sites to purchase from, it is clear that certain methods are favored over others. The shopping methods that a member of the community utilizes, as well as the aesthetic choices they make, turn the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community into a class-based subculture group. These habits create class fractions, which then influence the development of cliques and fragmentation in the community. There is a clear distinction in the Atlanta Lolita Community between the members who wear exclusively brand, and those who do not. Throughout the past year, the community has experienced a large rift in which small sub-groups have formed that have a specific focus (i.e. integration of a specific non-Lolita Japanese street fashion, brand-only, plus-sized, indie designs, etc.). This rift has resulted in smaller meet-ups, disorganization, and general hostility between members of different subgroups.

3.2.1 Facebook Buying, Selling, and Trading

In addition to venues where Lolitas can by new or newly commissioned pieces, Lolitas also turn to buying used products. Facebook in particular, has become a thriving venue for buying, selling, and trading Lolita-related products. Special sales groups have been formed for Lolitas all over the world to buy, sell, and trade with each other. Groups that I have been following include ‘Indie Lolita Sales’ and ‘Plus Size Lolita Sales in English’. The ‘Indie Lolita Sales’ page has over 1100 members and is organized by a Lolita from Valdosta, Georgia. This group is a place for Lolita indie designers and artists to post advertisements for their products and for commissions, as well as a venue for Lolitas searching for unique indie pieces and custom wares. There are certain rules associated with this group. Group members must refrain from selling used indie items, and members who have been banned from other sales groups and websites for scalping and scamming will be banned from this group as well. Indie designers are

only able to post once every 12 hours (or twice per day), and posts must be made in English. Designers are encouraged to advertise Lolita giveaways and preorders for their products.

The 'Plus Size Lolita Sales in English' group is similar, but services nearly one thousand more members than 'Indie Lolita Sales'. This group is for members to make sales posts (WTS-want to sell and WTB-want to buy) for the plus sized Lolita community. Members are also able to post WTT (want to trade) posts. Since many Western Lolitas often do not fit the rigid Japanese brand sizes, they turn to indie brands, custom designs, and replicas to satisfy their Lolita desires. So the majority of the items posted in this group are not Japanese brand. In this Facebook group, members will make sales posts which include a photo and measurements of the garment. This allows for Lolita to scroll through one site instead of searching all over the internet to find a piece that fits their measurements. In this group, members may sell Lolita clothing and accessories in any condition and are limited to only one post once every 24 hours. Members who are making sales posts must include a link containing feedback from previous buyers. This is a way for potential buyers to assess the reputability of a seller.

3.2.2 Chinese Replicas and Bodyline

Many Lolitas also turn to Chinese replica shops as a way to attain the Japanese brand prints and aesthetic they desire, and in a size and at a price that is much more affordable. China's thriving counterfeit market developed before the country's economic reform in the 1980s and 1990s when the economy was tightly regulated and goods were not easily accessible (Lin 2011:1-2). It is divided into regional specializations. For instance, the Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces specialize in handbags and high-end clothing, while the Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces specialize in low-end electronics (Lin 2011:31). Counterfeit markets occupy a "gray

zone" between the formal economy and the informal economy. For example, knockoff goods aim to compete with brand named luxury goods, but also act as advertisements and aid in raising product awareness.

An easy way to buy Chinese replicas is through Taobao (as previously discussed) and through custom replica designers. A very popular replica designer is Oo Jia. In order to purchase a replica from her, a Lolita must email her with the desired Japanese brand dress name or photo and the desired measurements. Oo Jia's rate is generally $100-$110 US dollars for a custom replica jumperskirt. This price includes shipping costs from China. For an example, Kera, my key informant, purchased a Baby the Stars Shine Bright (Japanese brand) replica jumperskirt through a Chinese replica shop. The original Baby the Stars Shine Bright price is over $300 plus tax and shipping. Kera was able to purchase a custom sized replica of the same dress for $110 including shipping.

Though Chinese replicas are popular among Lolitas, there seems to be a stigma attached to them. Some members find the purchase of Chinese replicas to be stealing from Japanese brands and are very critical of other members who wear them. The term 'replica-chan' has been created as a derogatory term associated with members who purchase Chinese replicas. Some Lolitas will even attempt to pass their Chinese replicas off as Japanese brand garments to avoid being policed by the community. Kera admits to having accused multiple girls of being 'replica-chans' to other members, even though she herself owns some replica dresses.

In addition to Chinese replica shopping, some Lolitas also resort to off-brand shopping. The most popular off-brand is Bodyline. This is considered to be the first step in online Lolita shopping for new members. Bodyline is based out of Japan and aims to create unique Lolita fashion clothing and accessories as well as cosplay, visual kei, kogal, maid, and child fashions.

For their Lolita fashions, Bodyline is clearly influenced by the global Lolita community's preference for brand clothing and accessories. Popular tastes of the consumer are extremely significant in that they greatly influence the fashion industry, which carefully analyzes consumer taste and lifestyle, then produces and markets a commodity for the public. This process is called "lifestyle" marketing (Entwistle 2000:225-6). Bodyline creates Lolita fashion and accessories that are very similar to brand items, but are sold for a much lower price. The effectiveness of the Lolita fashion industry has created a new language of style and has become an immediately accessible international barometer of fashion for Lolitas, reaching consumers from all over the world (Breward 1995:229). The thriving replica and off-brand market sends a few messages to Japanese brand Lolita companies. Japanese brands are not affordable to many members of the Lolita fashion community, creating a void that has been filled by Chinese replicas and off-brand clothing and accessories.

3.2.3 Brand Shopping

While Japanese replicas seem to be placed on the bottom tier of the Lolita clothing hierarchy, in contrast, brand clothing is clearly viewed as the most prestigious and sought after form of Lolita clothing. Shopping for Japanese brand clothing and accessories can be a complicated and exhausting process. Particularly in regards to brand print releases. 'Prints' are often associated with a series of items with the same design. These prints typically come in different forms (one piece dress, jumperskirt, or skirt). They are normally available in a few different colorways.

When many Japanese brands release new prints to the online global market, there is a general formula that is followed. Amanda spoke in detail about her love for the Angelic Pretty

brand. She explained that "Angelic Pretty only releases their new prints on Friday nights around 8:00pm. These release times vary wildly. New prints can be released as early as Friday afternoon and as late as Sunday night". Angelic Pretty (and most other Japanese brands) only produce a limited supply of garments with a particular print. Therefore, as soon as a print is sold out in their online store, a Lolita must buy the product second-hand from another Lolita. Amanda said, "I have stayed up for over twenty-four hours online waiting for a new print release from Angelic Pretty…during brand-release weekends, my boyfriend and I will take turns sitting at the computer and hitting the refresh button on the website over and over again until the print is released". Since these Japanese brand prints are highly prized in the global Lolita community, they sell out very fast.

Figure 3.2.2 Bittersweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

This process creates a feeling of artificial scarcity for these products (Lehdonvirta and Virtanen 2010:25). The limited availability of these print garments creates the illusion of them being more valuable than they actually are. Lolitas who buy these products are buying the prestige associated with having a rare and expensive item. Aside from the creation of artificial

scarcity, this processes also influences scalping within the community. Often associated with ticket sales, scalping is the purchasing of an item at retail price from a company and then selling the unused product at a much higher price to someone else. Some Lolitas will buy new print releases for the listed price directly from the Japanese brand online shop, and then turn around and resell the item on a Lolita sales site at a much higher price, sometimes 100%-500% increase in price.

3.3 Fashion Shows in Lolita

This preference for Japanese brand clothing was seen quite clearly at the Anime Weekend Atlanta 2014 Lolita fashion show. As I mentioned in chapter 2, the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community hosts a few fashion shows throughout the year, the largest of which occurs at Anime Weekend Atlanta. The fashion shows are typically separated into two parts: Japanese brand fashions (sometimes including visual kei and punk fashions) and indie Lolita fashions. The brand fashions section is often hosted by the brand itself or by an authorized distributor and is one of the most anticipated events of the year. The indie fashions section brings in indie designer fashions from all over the United States. These clothes are often available for sale after the show in the convention "dealer's room".

At Anime Weekend Atlanta 2014, I had the opportunity to work as one of the seven crew members for the fashion-track of the convention. I worked closely with our special guest brand, Baby the Stars Shine Bright (BTSSB) based out of Tokyo, Japan. I spent many hours working in the dealer's room helping sell BTSSB clothing and accessories to excited Lolitas who came by throughout the three-day event. I also had the privilege of helping set-up for the tea party which had more than eighty attendees. However, the most thrilling, tiring, and ultimately most

rewarding experience I had at AWA 2014 was helping backstage at the BTSSB and indie designer fashion show.

I arrived at the convention center bright and early at 8:00am to help prepare for the fashion show. When I arrived, the models were eagerly waiting to have their hair and makeup done before they had to get dressed. At first, I stood there awkwardly without direction. I was soon directed to steam each and every piece of BTSSB clothing before the models arrived to get dressed. It was very important to the BTSSB designer and her crew that the clothes looked pristine while onstage. After an hour of steaming all of the outfits, models entered back stage from the

Figure 3.3.1 BTSSB Model in the AWA 2014 Fashion Show.
Photography by Mario Panebianco.

hair and make-up room and begun getting dressed into their assigned coordinates. These models had applied and been hand-picked by the BTSSB designer a couple of weeks prior to the convention. The indie models were also being prepped at that time, though they did not have AWA fashion-track crew members helping them get dressed (we were told to stick with the

BTSSB models). I was responsible for helping the models get dressed which included tying their waist-ties, lacing up their bodices, buttoning their blouses, putting on their shoes, and clipping on their many accessories. Some models had two or more crew members helping them dress all at one time. The indie models, however, did not receive the same treatment.

Aside from the brand-indie brand rift backstage, the fashion show itself went very well. The entire show lasted roughly an hour. First, the indie models went on stage. Each indie designer was introduced and the emcee for the event provided the audience with a bit of information about the designer and their clothing line. The music was loud and cheerful and added to the atmosphere very well since the majority of the indie-brands were sweet Lolita style. After each of the indie models finished their walks, there was noticeable shift in atmosphere when it was time to present the BTSSB models. The light in the room got much dimmer and the

Figure 3.3.2 Indie Brand Model in the AWA 2014 Fashion Show.
Photography by Mario Panebianco.

music became quiet and eerie. Many of their looks were classic, mori, and sweet, so the change in atmosphere seemed odd. Each model walked onto the stage very slowly and had a precise

pose that she had to make at the end of the runway. The BTSSB portion of the fashion show was very calculated and timely. A couple of models even also had clothing changes mid-show. After their first look was presented to the audience, they would walk of stage and run over to the changing area. I, along with three other crew members were responsible for helping with these quick changes. Within minutes, these girls were stripped down and redressed ready to go back onstage.

Overall, the show was a complete success. It started on time, no models missed their cues, the emcee was flawless with her presentation, and the audience seemed very pleased by their excited applause. At the end of the show, all of the BTSSB models got together and took group photos with the designers before changing into their regular convention attire. There were also a few photos taken of the designers and the crew together, which was very exciting since I was able to participate. It was unfortunate, however, that there did not seem to be as much regard for the indie designers when it came to the photographs. They were often forgotten or told

Figure 3.3.3 BTSSB Models, Designer, and AWA Fashion Track Crew. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

to step aside to make way for the BTSSB models. This act of photographic superiority also shows that brand clothing and accessories are more prized in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese

Street Fashion Community. This act is also an example of commodity fetishism which is the tendency to believe that certain goods have inherent value, rather than being products of human labor (Marx 1867:46). Brand clothing companies also engage in the practice of artificial scarcity for these products (Lehdonvirta and Virtanen 2010:25). The limited availability of certain print garments creates the illusion of them being more valuable than they actually are. The value is not inherent in the material items themselves, but an effect of the social organization of exchange. The scarcity of brand clothing and accessories has given them a special mystique. Rather than only being viewed as products of human labor, the value of 'brand' has been socially negotiated among Lolitas, making them become very valuable. The love for certain brand clothing and accessories in the Lolita fashion community has grown and evolved over time to become what it is today.

During my backstage fashion show experience, I came to fully realize the community's emphasis on and preference of brand items over indie or off-brand items. The indie models and designers were treated very poorly compared to the BTSSB designer and models. A couple of weeks after the convention, after all of the Lolitas had recovered from the excitement and stress associated with the large convention, a flood of posts were made on Behind the Bows about

Figure 3.3.4 BTSSB Model at the AWA 2014 Fashion Show.
Photography by Mario Panebianco.

the lack of organization in the fashion show, and particularly the lack of concern for the indie brands, designers, and their models. The fashion show displayed an overt preference for brand clothing instead of indie clothing. This demonstrates that brand clothing is more accepted in the community, is more likely to contribute to the production of a positive impression, and is more likely to gain a member more social and symbolic capital in the community.

Figure 3.3.5 Indie Brand Model at the AWA 2014 Fashion Show.
Photography by Mario Panebianco.

In conclusion, the clothing and accessories are what first and foremost connects Lolitas. The beautiful clothing and accessories are what initially draws members to the community. Lolitas choose these elements in order to create and manage their impression and their 'frontstage' (Goffman 1959:22), which either contributes to or detracts from their impression management. Lolitas must avoid general sources of embarrassment in their coordinates in order to add to the character and help protect their 'backstage self'. Lolitas must be in character at all times and be able to recover at a moment's notice if they are caught off guard or make a mistake in the performance (Goffman 1959:210). The process of Lolita online shopping is very involved and time consuming, encompassing various shopping methods including Facebook buying, selling, and trading, indie and replica shopping, and the brand shopping experience. The utilization of these different shopping methods can increase or reduce the impression that other members have of a Lolita, which then influences his or her prestige in the community.

4 PHOTOGRAPHY

4.1 Dynamics of Power: Lolitas Being Photographed in Public

Photography, like fashion, is essential to the management of the Lolita persona. A photograph of a great looking coordinate can enhance a member's social capital, while an unflattering photo can destroy a member's popularity in the community indefinitely. Photographs can have deep meaning for the photographer, but in this case, have deeper meaning for the person being photographed. Photos are evidence that things actually happened, particularly events and travels (Sontag 1977:3-24). They are also often a defense against social anxiety and a tool of power (Sontag 1977:8) for many Lolitas. In this chapter, I argue that unauthorized photography by the public acts as a violation of the intended impression that Lolitas have worked so hard to create. I illustrate this point by discussing my observation experience as the Atlanta Zoo. I proceed in this chapter with a discussion of photography as a complex social practice and detail how the members of the community utilize photography. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about the use of photography in social media to manage the Lolita impression in the virtual community. I go on to illustrate this phenomenon with my observations at the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community Putumayo Brand Tea Party at Anime Weekend Atlanta 2013.

The photographic cataloging of coordinates in Lolita fashion, like those in the AWA 2014 fashion show, is very important for a variety of reasons, particularly when taken at meet-ups. The members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community love to attend events and meet-ups throughout the year to show-off their new coordinates and to catch-up on conversation with other Lolitas. Many of these meet-ups and events are held in public locations such as a park,

restaurant or café, shopping venue, public event, or festival. On occasion, bystanders will approach the crowd of Lolitas and ask if they can take their picture or have their picture taken with the group. In these instances, the members are usually happy to oblige. Lolitas will enthusiastically strike a pose and smile for the camera. Also during these events, it is quite common that non-Lolita observers become interested in the clothing and secretly snap photos with their phones. Some of the Lolitas that I have met do not mind that their photos are being taken without their permission. However, the majority of the community members find this action to be unacceptable and a violation of their privacy.

Figure 4.1.1 Valentine's Day Meet-up at the White Windmill Bakery and Café. Photo Courtesy of Amber Jones. Photography by Unknown.

The most extreme example that I have observed of a Lolita getting angry at a bystander for taking their photograph happened at an event at Zoo Atlanta. The event was called "Seeing Double! Lolita Twins at the Zoo". The event was held on May 3rd at 11:00am. Lolitas were encouraged to pair off and plan matching coordinates for the event. I had the opportunity to "twin" with Janelle for this event. I was sporting my newly commissioned "mori" style Lolita

(forest girl) jumperskirt by Elegy. The jumperskirt was cream and brown and had countless ruffles. My "twin" wore a cream and brown ouji-kodona coordinate with pieces from Elegy and from Oo-Jia that complimented my coordinate very well.

My twin and I waited eagerly at the gates of the zoo for the other Lolitas and their "twins" to arrive. Once all of the other members arrived, we entered the facility on this crowded Saturday and began to plan our route around the park. We decided to go visit the giraffes first. As we walked throughout the park, multiple people asked to take photographs with us. Naturally, the members and I happily agreed. Many people in the crowd were interested in our clothing and asked us what it was called and why we wear it. Again, the members answered with smiles on their faces and explained in detail the origins of Lolita fashion and the purpose of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. The children that were visiting the zoo that day found our clothing particularly fascinating. At one instance while looking at the bears, I overheard a little girl, probably not older than five, say to her father, "Daddy, why do the pretty dolls keep following us everywhere"? It was at this point that I realized we were much more of an attraction than the zoo animals that day.

Figure 4.1.2 Zoo Meet-up. Photo Courtesy of Victoria Felder. Photography by Unknown.

The issue with the photo-taking occurred half-way through our event. We had been making our way through the park when we finally made it to the orangutan enclosure. The crowd had died-down a little bit and we thought that it was a great time for a group photo. One of the post-Affrilliation, INC. administrators of the community was not wearing Lolita to the event and had been taking photos throughout the meet-up. He decided to take the group photo of us. We all gathered together, tallest girls in the back, shorter girls in the front, and "twins" side-by-side. We fluffed our skirts, turned our most flattering side toward the camera, and smiled elegantly. We began shifting position for more photographs when I heard one the Lolitas yell out, "Put that camera down! I don't want anyone taking pictures of me that I don't give permission to!" The Lolita was directing her anger towards a woman nearly 20 feet away. She had been taking pictures of us with her cellphone. The woman did not respond to the request to put her phone down. The Lolita continued speaking while still standing with the group, "Delete it! Delete it! I don't want you taking pictures of me!" The offender stood there blankly. The woman turned to walk away and the Lolita stepped out of line and walked hastily after her. By this point, the woman was gone and the Lolita was extremely upset at the woman's blatant violation.

This action of un-authorized photo-taking by the public upsets the Lolitas because it is a violation of their carefully-managed impression. During planned photography sessions, or when asked permission by an interested party, the Lolita has the opportunity to prepare her or himself by standing in a particular position, holding their skirt in a specific way, and accentuating their most flattering features. The Lolitas fear that un-authorized and potentially unflattering photographs could end up on the internet and ruin the impression that they have been carefully crafting up to that point. These unauthorized photographs may disclose the reality (Goffman

1959:231). The hard work that they have put forth in managing their impressions is endangered in these scenarios.

4.2 How Lolitas Utilize Photography

Lolitas are clearly very specific about the photographs that are taken of them and find photos significant in various different ways. Photos are visual evidence of their socioeconomic status as well as a validation of their efforts in the Fashion. Lolitas also utilize photography in various different ways. Members use photographs as evidence of attending meet-ups and events as well as proving that they purchased a specific brand print or item. Lolitas also utilize photography in social media to a wide extent by posting photos of themselves on various forums, particularly on Facebook.

Lolitas take an abundance of photographs of themselves, either during events, with friends, or by themselves at home. These photographs show the effort that the Lolita made in putting together a particular coordinate. The more photographs a member takes and the more

Figure 4.2.1 A Lolita posing for a photo at the Atlanta Lolita Formal Tea Party. Photo by Author.

coordinates that she displays to others, results in the accumulation of status in the community. A Lolita who only has photos of her or himself in one particular coordinate will not be viewed as a 'true' Lolita because they have not accumulated enough items. In order to feel validation by the community, members will make "wardrobe posts" on Facebook or Tumblr at the beginning of each calendar year. The purpose of these wardrobe posts is to document and display every Lolita item that a member owns. Lolitas will have sections of their wardrobe posts reserved for jumperskirts, skirts, one-piece dresses (OPs), headbows, petticoats, blouses, socks, tights, wigs, accessories, shoes, etc. Most Lolitas will carefully lay each piece out on their bed and snap a photo. The larger a member's wardrobe post, the more impressive it is. If the majority of the wardrobe post is made up of brand items, it is even more remarkable.

Members also use photographs as evidence of attending meet-ups and events. Lolitas reserve most of their photo-taking for meet-ups and large events. During these events, they carefully document their coordinates with photographs. These photographs are then posted on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram in order to show friends, family, and fellow Lolitas their experiences from the event as well as their carefully put-together coordinates. The "pics or it didn't happen" philosophy is particularly important when a Lolita obtains a new "print". A Lolita will post on one of the many Lolita-based Facebook pages that she or he got a new "brand" dress. Since these products are so expensive, sought-after, and often difficult to obtain, to community members it is extremely important that Lolitas provide photographical evidence of their purchase. This is often done by simply posting a photograph of her or himself in the particular dress or coordinate on Facebook. These photos can also be achieved by posting them along with the wardrobe posts.

Figure 4.2.2 Wardrobe Post Example #1[14]

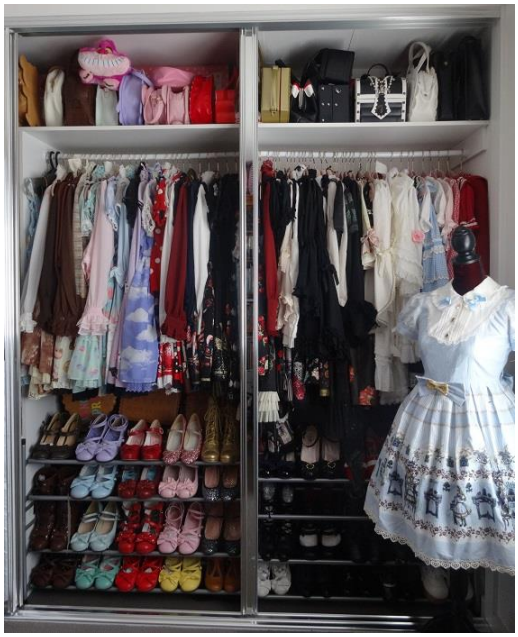

Figure 4.2.3 Wardrobe Post Example #2[15]

Aside from wardrobe posts on Facebook and Tumblr, Lolitas also often post pictures of themselves in their coordinates on Lolita-specific photosharing Facebook pages. The most popular is called "Closet of Frills: Daily Lolita Coords". On this page, Lolitas will post photos of

[14] http://chiichick.livejournal.com/210683.html. Last accessed November 15, 2014.
[15] http://alyssiumbaby.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/wardrobe.jpg. Last accessed November 15, 2014.

themselves along with the brand of each of their items. It seems that the goal of these posts is to receive validation of a particular coordinate. Closet of Frills is open to Lolitas all over the world and receives posts from dozens of people each day. It is exciting to see the regional variation in Lolita style and to see Lolitas from different countries represented. However, there is risk in posting to this page. Members of the page will offer "concrit" or constructive criticism, giving the original poster of the photograph advice on how to better construct their coordinate. The majority of this "concrit" is helpful. For example, some members will suggest that a Lolita wear a different blouse, or different colored shoes, etc. On occasion, however, some members will reply with nasty comments such as, "If you would stop being fat it would look better", or "Maybe you should try wearing brand and not that replica shit". Closet of Frills also seems to be fodder for Behind the Bows (BtB). It is common to see a Lolita post on Closet of Frills during the week and then see the photo reposted on BtB with mean comments or ugly drawn-on faces when the weekend rolls around.

There was recently an alternative to Closet of Frills created for plus-sized Lolitas. The group was created by Cheryth, a plus-sized member of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community. The group is called "Fluffy Frills: JFashion Coord Sharing for size 14+". She designed this page to be a safe space for plus-sized Lolitas to share their coordinates without fear of being slandered or being posted to BTB. Cheryth has witnessed many of her fellow Lolitas post to Closet of frills and received both helpful and hurtful "concrit". During my fieldwork, I posted to Closet of frills and received constructive criticism and was told to wear a more Lolita-like blouse with my coordinate. I felt apprehensive about posting on Closet of Frills because I was afraid that I would be posted on BTB. Luckily, I was not. My experience with

posting the exact same photo to Fluffy Frills was much more positive. I received praise for my coord and I did not feel self-conscious.

In general, photographs greatly influence a Lolita's impression given off to other members of the community, resulting in them being overly-critical of their coordinate photographs. These photos are not only a display of their coordinate, but also visual evidence of their socioeconomic status as well as a validation of their efforts in the Fashion. Members use photographs as evidence of attending meet-ups and events (Sontag 1977:3-24) as well as proving that they purchased a specific brand print or item. Lolitas also utilize photography in social media to a wide extent by posting photos of themselves on various forums (particularly on Facebook) in order to manage and enhance their impression given off to other members of the community.

4.3 Photography in Social Media

My most in-depth and lengthy observation during my research was the Putumayo Tea Party at Anime Weekend Atlanta (AWA). This observation clearly illustrates the significance of photographs in the building of the Lolita impression and in impression management. AWA lasted from Thursday, September 26th, 2013, to Sunday, September 29th, 2013. The Putumayo tea was held on Sunday, September 29th, from 10:00am-12:30pm. The tea was organized by Japanese fashion brand distributor, Harajuku Hearts, based out of San Francisco. The tea was hosted by Shunsuke Hasegawa, designer of Putumayo (rock, punk, gothic, and Lolita fashion) and Misako Aoki (Japanese gothic and Lolita model). The AWA website advertised the event as, "An exclusive, limited seating Tea Party, hosted by Putumayo designer Shunsuke Hasegawa, and

Figure 4.3.1 Lolitas posing for a photo before the tea begins. Photography by author.

the multi-talented Ambassador of Cute, Misako Aoki!"[16]. I was able to attend this tea party after paying for a fifty dollar ticket and purchasing a Putumayo brand accessory (a rule of admittance). The tea was limited to the first fifty people to purchase tickets.

Each year, there are two formal tea parties held for the community: the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community Formal 'high' tea held each January, and a brand-hosted tea party at Anime Weekend Atlanta in September. These are the two biggest events of the year for the community. Because of the significance of each of these events, it is during these times that Lolitas wear their best coordinates, most expensive accessories, and wear their most fashionable wigs and make-up. Each Lolita aims to stand out from the crowd with his or her carefully selected coordinate that often takes months to prepare. It is no surprise that the Lolitas would want to capture these moments with photographs and permanent digital images.

[16] http://www.awa-con.com/. Last accessed on October 15, 2014.

Figure 4.3.2 Lolitas patiently waiting for the tea party to begin. Photography by author.

Prior to the start of the tea party, the Lolitas slowly gathered outside of the room that was designated for the tea party in the Galleria convention center. Outside of the room were large tables that the men and women would slowly fill in anticipation for the yearly event and the opportunity to meet Shunsuke Hasegawa and Misako Aoki. This waiting period lasted roughly thirty minutes. During this time, I would hear an almost constant flood of requests for photos. Phrases like, “Oh my God! I Love your dress! I’ve got to get a picture of you!”, “Can we get a picture together, you are just too cute!”, and “Can we get all of the girls wearing purple together for a group shot?” were repeated over and over. Though there were tables and chairs for the Lolitas to sit at to rest their feet from the extremely long and tiring weekend they had just endured, they were persistent in getting as many photographs taken of themselves and of each other as possible.

The tea party lasted from 10:00am-12:30pm. There were various designated portions of the party: introductions, a brief brunch, gift-giving, and a photo-taking and autograph signing

session. The introduction, brunch, and gift-giving portions lasted roughly one hour of the two and a half hour tea party. During this time, Lolitas socialized, were able to eat small tea sandwiches and pastries and learn about the hosts of the event. While these portions of the event were taking place, Lolitas would snap photos of each other across the tables, sneak pictures of the hosts without their knowledge, and carefully document each piece of food they put on their plates with the artistic precision of a cell phone. During the brunch portion, a few of the Lolitas decided to ask Misako Aoki and Shunsuke Hasegawa to have photos taken with them. After a few of the attendees did this, including myself, the organizers from Harajuku Hearts announced that there would be a designated time for more photos and autographs and to please wait until the other portions of the tea party had concluded. There was a noticeable wave of excitement that flooded the room because the Lolitas then realized that they would have their own individual few minutes with the hosts for as many photos and autographs that they could squeeze in. However, this did not stop the Lolitas and the hosts from snapping pictures discretely.

After the introductions, brunch, and gift-giving portions had concluded, the remaining hour and a half were dedicated to group and individual photo shoots and autographs. While the Lolitas were waiting patiently for Aoki and Hasegawa to arrive at their tables for group photos, the men and women were posing for individual and group photos with their friends at adjacent tables. A few Lolitas brought expensive high-quality digital cameras to take photos, while others

Figure 4.3.3 Misako Aoki signing printed photographs.
Photography by Author.

were taking pictures with wind-up disposable cameras or using their cell phones. I observed a few Lolitas who had brought their own travel-sized digital photo printers so that they could take photos of themselves with Misako Aoki and Shunsuke Hasegawa and then have them sign the physical photograph. When the hosts arrived at my table, the Lolitas surrounded them giddily, asking for autographs and photos together. There were also group photographs of each table's occupants and the hosts. After the hosts visited each of the fifty Lolitas and the tea party was nearing an end, a few last group photos were taken and the representative from Harajuku Hearts gave her closing statements and thanked the hosts for a lovely party.

After the event was over, Anime Weekend Atlanta had concluded, and the Lolitas were back at home and recovering from a strenuous weekend, various social media sites were flooded with pictures of Lolitas from the event. The Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community administrators posted many pictures from the tea party and from AWA on their Facebook page. Many of the girls who were present at the tea party posted pictures they had taken and tagged their friends who were also in the pictures. The Lolitas carefully selected new

photos to replace their current profile pictures, and new Facebook albums were created and dedicated to the event. After the conclusion of Anime Weekend Atlanta and the Putumayo tea party, I decided to create my own Facebook album to house all of the photos related to Lolita fashion that I have taken or been tagged in. The album is called, 'Lovely Lolita Life <3'. Aside from the photographs that I personally uploaded onto Facebook, I had many photos 'tagged' of me that other people had taken of which I was not aware. These tagged photos were then linked to my profile so that my friends could see photos of me that other people had taken and uploaded.

The weekend was extremely successful and I was able to make many useful observations. My original intentions were not to exclusively focus on photo-taking and their significance when I was attending the party. Instead, I was trying to gain a general understanding of the social class and social status implications associated with the tea party. Fortunately, I was able to make many observations and draw several conclusions about the community that I was not expecting. From this observation, I found that the majority of the men and women in the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community love to take photos and have photos taken of themselves in their Lolita fashion coordinates. It is clear that many of the Lolitas I observed are practicing the art of impression management on Facebook. Each Lolita that I interviewed admitted to carefully choosing which pictures they post of themselves on Facebook and are even more selective in choosing their profile pictures as a way to build and maintain their impressions given off. Kera, agitatedly said, "I become very upset when friends 'tag' photos of me without my consent on Facebook because I do not have the opportunity to review it first. I know a lot of other girls get pissed about that too". She concluded that if the photo is unflattering, she would get very angry because her other friends may have seen it and made assumptions about her style or personality,

etc. It seems as though this threat of having unflattering photos tagged is directly interfering with a person's impression management. Luckily, Facebook has an option for people to request that all tagged photos be approved by the person being tagged in the picture. Though this allows a person to manage their own photos and have the authority to decide which pictures are displayed on their own profile, it does not keep the photos from being posted on other people's profiles, allowing another person's audience to view a picture of you anonymously and without consent.

The Lolitas will prepare their most attractive coordinates weeks or months in advance for a large event or meet-up in order to prepare for photos to be taken. My interview subjects were very clear in that they planned coordinates with the knowledge that their photos would be taken and uploaded onto Facebook or another social media site. Knowing that their photos will be taken and uploaded onto Facebook puts added pressure onto the Lolitas to make successful and aesthetically pleasing clothing and accessory choices. One interviewee stated that when she does not have many photos taken of her at events, she feels as though she did not have a successful coordinate and many people did not like her choice of clothing and accessories that day.

Figure 4.3.4 Sweet Lolita. Photography by Mario Panebianco.

Dick Hebdige explores the concept of subculture fashion and style as a form of communication. He concludes that ensembles (or 'coordinates' in the Lolitasphere) make statements about class and social status, personal attractiveness and self-image (Hebdige 1979: 101). Lolita coordinates fit this description very well, particularly in regards to social status and personal attractiveness. Many of the Lolitas pride themselves on owning specific Japanese 'brand' clothing and accessories. Again, Lolitas will save their money for weeks or months to purchase the most recent Angelic Pretty brand jumperskirt or Baby the Stars Shine Bright brand blouse and headbow. Having these items is a mark of social class and fashion superiority in much of the community. Having these items and displaying them proudly gives off the impression of high class and social status. When Lolitas decide which coordinates to wear, they will often add 'brand' pieces in order to obtain a certain level of status. When choosing profile pictures, Lolitas will often accentuate these brand items in the photograph. For example, if a girl is wearing a hand-made dress but is wearing a one-hundred dollar Innocent World brand headbow, she will likely take a photo that emphasizes the headbow instead of the dress.

5 CONCLUSION

The members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community are actively engaged in the art of impression management. They practice impression management in both the face-to-face community and the virtual community through the clothing that they choose to wear and the photographs that they display to others on social media. This critical eye that is maintained by the majority of the members has resulted in the community acting as a sort of panopticon, which has influenced the use of anonymous forums and policing in the community. I focused on the visual aspects of the community and how they influence the impression that the

members aim to portray to others. Through my research and writing, I answered the following question: How do Lolitas manage their impressions through various mediums such as the internet, interactions with the face-to-face community, fashion, and photography? I focused on three specific themes in my paper to illustrate the various ways in which Lolitas manage their impressions. These themes include the face-to-face and virtual community, fashion, and photography. Each of these themes holds great significance for the members. Though these themes are not all-encompassing of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion community subculture, they represent the most significant visual aspects of Lolita fashion and those that best define the community.

The two types of communications that aid in impression management are expressions given, and expressions given off. Impression management is concerned primarily with the expressions given off and how others perceive them (Goffman 1959:3-4). It is also a performance of an outer self, similar to acting out a character in a play. Lolitas are manage their impressions given off through their clothing, photography, and social media maintenance. Lolitas display the 'frontstage' view, also known as a 'front', which refers to all activity of an individual that occurs while actively managing the impression (Goffman 1959:22). Lolitas carefully monitor themselves to ensure outward display of elegance, fantastic gallantry, sweetness, virtuosity, and brilliance that is necessary of a 'proper' Lolita. Members of the community avoid unmeant gestures, faux pas, and general sources of embarrassment in order to add to their Lolita character and help protect their backstage self. The Lolitas must remember their parts, be in character at all times, and be able to recover at a moment's notice if they are caught off guard or make a mistake in the performance.

Lolitas aim to obtain a favorable social outcome with their community members by implementing an often manufactured persona. The successful manipulation of a member's impression can positively influence their social status and increase their prestige within the community. Many members of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community will painstakingly manipulate their public image in order to gain prestige, positively influence their social status, and gain entrance into popular cliques within the community. In general, A Lolita's ability to manipulate their impressions given off will help them gain prestige, social status, and access to popular cliques in the community over time.

My research with the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community is an illustration of one of the global youth and young-adult subcultures of today. My work has taken the theories of scholars such as Dick Hebdige and Erving Goffman and has applied them to a global fashion phenomenon in Atlanta. My analysis shows the variety of impression management tactics that members of subculture groups often utilize as well as the catalysts for these practices, including policing on anonymous forums. I have shown how these practices particularly apply to a virtual context. Up to this point, there has also been little to no anthropological research produced on the subject of Lolita fashion culture in the United States. My research and analysis of the Atlanta Lolita and Japanese Street Fashion Community provided and in-depth look at the Lolita fashion subculture in the US.

There are many aspects of the culture and community that warrant anthropological analysis and would be interesting to learn about and research. Further research needs to be conducted on the integration of sweet Lolita fashion and age-play. I discussed the Lolitas' denial of affiliation with Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 book. I do however, suspect that there is connection between the sweet Lolita aesthetic and the desire to be infantilized. This seems to be a very

touchy subject that not many Lolitas want to discuss openly, therefore, I did not find it a suitable topic for the basis of my personal research. This subject, along with many others, should be the next steps in anthropological research and analysis of Lolita.

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